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Digital Edition

## Organizers of IAAPA Expo 2024 have packed a week like no other

AT: Pam Sherborne

[psherborne@amusementtoday.com](mailto:psherborne@amusementtoday.com)

ORLANDO, Fla. — Planners of this year's IAAPA Expo seem to be able to perform magic; apropos for a magical place as Orlando, Florida. Taking place from November 18-22, at the **Orange County Convention Center**, the schedule of activities from networking to educational sessions to trade show programming could fill a fairly large tome.

Yet, with added magic, IAAPA planners are able to condense it into brochure size.

IAAPA Expo is, by all accounts, the largest gathering of amusement park and attractions professionals in the world. It brings together industry leaders, innovators and experts for four days. The event highlights the latest trends, innovations and technologies shaping the future of the attractions industry.

"We are excited to invite professionals from all corners of the globe to join us for IAAPA Expo 2024," said **Jakob Wahl**, president and chief executive officer of IAAPA. "This event provides a unique platform for industry professionals to connect, learn from each other and discover the latest products and services that will enhance their attractions and operations."

In what now seems to be a tradition, the expo



The Orange County Convention Center (above) is set to once again host the amusement industry's premier trade show, IAAPA Expo. The event and its massive showfloor brings together industry leaders, innovators and experts for four days.  
AT/TIM BALDWIN

offers attendees a sold-out tradeshow floor with more than 1,100 exhibitors set to showcase the latest innovations as well as the tried and true.

Trade show pavilions this year will include Family Entertainment; Food and Beverage; Games and Arcade; Inflatables; Operational Services; Outdoor Exhibitors; Rides and Equipment; Show Production and Design and Water Park.

Trade show days and hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Tuesday through Thursday, Nov. 19 to 21, and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., on Friday, Nov. 22.

The event will host a comprehensive education program, featuring sessions led by industry experts covering topics such as guest experience, sustainability, technology, artificial intelligence, marketing and communications, safety,

security, and more.

For the first time, IAAPA Expo has expanded to the North Concourse of the convention center. Exciting events and a variety of new offerings will be located on the north side of the building.

IAAPA's education team took a great bit of care to build a conference program that offers something for everyone.

**Michael Shelton**, vice president and executive director of IAAPA's North America region, said session speakers this year truly represent all pockets of the industry.

"This year's EDUSessions include everything from a deep dive into artificial intelligence to how to build a better financial foundation to trending public relations topics and crisis communications," Shelton said.



Some of the education, informational and panel session topics will include Transforming IP into Tangible Magic: The Art of Immersive Attractions; Transforming Digital Menu Board for Power and Profit at Concession; Maximizing Park Potential: The Advantages of Leasing Digital Signage Technology; Transforming Digital Menu Board for Power and Profit at Concession; Discover the

Transformative Power of Self Service Kiosks; Empowering Women in Leadership: Insights from the Water Park Industry; Hand over and Performance with On-Ride Data Integration; Security Roundtable and Maximizing Park Potential: The Advantages of Leasing Digital Signage Technology. IAAPA officials feel that the

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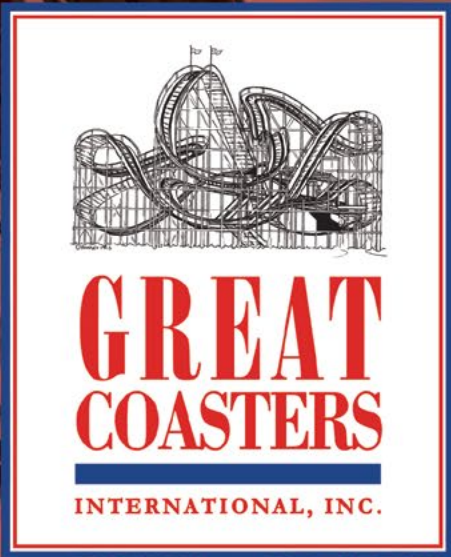
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# AMUSEMENT VIEWS



**AT NOTEBOOK:** John W.C. Robinson, [jrobinson@amusementtoday.com](mailto:jrobinson@amusementtoday.com)

## Weathering the storm



Robinson

This is *Amusement Today's* popular "Pre-IAAPA Expo" issue. This is the issue that gets us excited about the gigantic trade show that's just around the corner and tantalizes us with the possibilities and innovations we may discover along the Orange County Convention Center aisles. It is this time that we anticipate seeing old friends and associates, networking with new connections and begin to pull back the curtain on the season ahead. For about a week, this entire industry calls Orlando, Florida, home.

However, as we at *Amusement Today* complete work on this issue, we would be remiss to not discuss the devastation that has hit southeast America with the back-to-back landfalls of Hurricanes Helene and Milton. The latter, in particular, found itself impacting the hub of the North American amusement industry — Orlando, Florida.

The media has inundated us with images and videos of the damage, the flooding, the struggles of those in the storms' paths and the attempts to begin to put things back together. For all of us in this industry, the impact undoubtedly touches someone we know, someone we care about.

The associates we are about to network with, it was many of their homes that were damaged. The companies that we are about to plan for tomorrow with, many of them are in the midst of assessing what they'll have to rebuild or replace. At the root of this wonderful industry is people, and it is the people of the southeast — Florida, in particular — who are doing their absolute best roll with the one-two punch of these hurricanes.

And while they rebuild, they are also stepping forward. Disney announced it is investing \$3 million that will be used to assist its cast members, the local community and nonprofits aiding in recovery efforts. Dolly Parton announced a \$1 million donation to the Mountain Ways Foundation and officials from Dollywood Parks & Resorts and the singer's other area attractions pledged a \$1 million contribution of their own. Local water parks have opened their gates to be used as makeshift campgrounds for those who lost their homes.

This industry has weathered storms before. Its heart never fails to show through every single trial and tribulation. While our affected members work to heal, this industry continues to be a beacon of hope and strength.

**FLINT'S VIEW:** Bubba Flint



**INDUSTRY VOICE:** Michael Shelton, IAAPA

## IAAPA Expo promises optimism, innovation

As we approach the 2024 IAAPA Expo in Orlando, the mood among industry professionals is one of cautious optimism and relentless innovation. While the amusement and attractions industry faced strong recovery years in 2022 and 2023, 2024 has brought its own set of challenges. From inflation to supply chain disruptions, industry leaders are navigating a more complex landscape. Yet, the spirit of adaptation and creativity continues to thrive.

This year's expo will highlight more than 1,100 exhibitors, showcasing the latest advancements in guest experience, technology, and operational efficiency. The most exciting trends heading into 2025 are those that embrace immersive storytelling, AI-driven services and augmented and virtual reality attractions. The rise of personalized guest experiences, such as bespoke entertainment packages and exclusive VIP offerings, is transforming how attractions engage visitors. Moreover, dark rides and interactive



Shelton

water attractions are gaining momentum, reflecting a shift toward more dynamic, narrative-driven experiences.

The industry's unwavering commitment to long-term innovation continues to drive success. Parks are enhancing guest value while efficiently managing operational costs through creative strategies. Tailored pricing models, exciting new food and beverage offerings, and strengthened security measures are helping attractions attract steady visitor numbers, all while keeping the focus on delivering exceptional experiences and maintaining the highest standards of safety and quality.

IAAPA Expo 2024 will serve as a hub for these developments, fostering an atmosphere of innovation, collaboration and growth. As we head into 2025, there is a palpable sense that the industry is not just recovering but thriving, ready to offer guests more memorable, immersive and tech-forward experiences than ever before. The future of attractions is bright and the excitement for what's next is undeniable.

*Opinions expressed on this page are those of the columnist(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher.*



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# 2 MINUTE DRILL



AT: Janice Witherow

## Tom Rebbie, Philadelphia Toboggan Coasters, Inc.

One of the amusement industry's legends, **Tom Rebbie** is president, CEO and owner of **Philadelphia Toboggan Coasters, Inc.**, where he started in 1977 in the coaster car shop drilling floorboards for roller coaster cars. Rebbie has not looked back. His accomplishments are numerous, including expanding the company internationally, overseeing changes to safety systems and developing the Amusement Ride Transfer Accessibility Device to assist park guests with physical disabilities. To know Rebbie — and most industry people do! — is to love his dry, but quick wit, his generosity and his vast wisdom of the business.

**Title:** President/CEO/Owner.

**Number of years in the industry:** 47!

**Best thing about the industry:** The friends I have made around the world.

**Favorite amusement ride:** The Beast at Kings Island, Kings Mills, Ohio.

**If I wasn't working in the amusement industry, I would be ...** I was a police officer, so retired!

**Biggest challenge facing our industry:** Accepting change.

**The thing I like most about amusement/water park season is ...** The smiles on people's faces leaving an attraction.

**It's November! On Thanksgiving Day, I will be ...** At my daughter Janine and son-in-law's house with my wife Penny and stepson Brian, along with my sharp-as-a-tack dad Brice (who is 98!).

**Favorite outdoor activity:** Skiing, horse-back riding, skiing, scuba diving, skiing, motorcycle riding and oh yeah, skiing!

**The band that I would really like to see reunite is ...** The Beatles.

**The first thing I do when I get to work is ...** See how everyone's night, weekend or holiday was.

**If you could live at any period of time, except the present, when would it be?** Sixty seconds into the future!

**The most beautiful place I have ever been is ...** Zermatt, Switzerland, skiing around the Matterhorn.



After nearly 50 years in the amusement industry, Tom Rebbie has become a well-liked industry icon full of wisdom for the business at hand. COURTESY PHILADELPHIA TOBBOGAN COASTERS, INC.

**My all-time favorite dessert would have to be ...** Peanut butter pie.

**The last magazine I bought was ...** Horse, different breeds.

**My don't miss TV show is ...** Yellowstone.

**The super-hero I most identify with is ...** The Lone Ranger.

**Three things I always have in my garage are ...** My first car I bought in 1973 (1966 Mustang GT Convertible), my 2006 Mustang GT Convertible and my 2009 GT 500 Shelby.

**What historical figure would you most like to meet?** Audie Murphy (American soldier, actor and songwriter).

**The sport I watch most often is ...** Baseball.

**When making dinner, my "go-to" meal is ...** Cheeseburgers!

**I wish I had more time to do this:** Inventory my baseball memorabilia.

**My next vacation will be ...** Scuba diving in the Caribbean.

**The last song I sang out loud was ...** "Oh- La-Di-Oh-La-Da" by Paul McCartney..

**In one word, my life is ...** Eclectic.

## THE INDUSTRY SEEN

### Toasting the Best of the Best



**WEST MIFFLIN, Pa. —** During the 2024 Golden Ticket Awards event hosted by Kennywood, Penn Brewery crafted a special beer just for the networking event. Following Thursday meetings, board members of the NRCMA and AIMS met for a private event at the iconic Pennsylvania brewery — which began brewing craft beer back in 1986, making it one of the earliest pioneers in the American craft movement. Attendees had the opportunity to take home commemorative bottles of the one-of-a-kind lager. COURTESY JENNIFER LONGO

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►IAAPA  
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Orange County Convention Center will once again provide the perfect setting for IAAPA Expo, with its state-of-the-art facilities and easy accessibility.

Home to one of the top airports in the world, Orlando's connectivity and ease of access allows attendees to connect with fellow industry professionals and explore a city known for its attractions, including theme parks, water parks and entertainment complexes.

Some of the expo's special events will be held ahead of the IAAPA Expo kickoff. IAAPA Rookies: FEC 101 will start Saturday, Nov. 16. This event will offer experts in LBE and FEC management a multi-day program that will help develop, design and launch a business.

Also on this same day is the IAAPA Institute for Attractions Professionals Institute Program.

Planned for Sunday,

Nov. 17, is the 21st Annual IAAPA International Charity Golf Tournament, the 14th Annual IAAPA Charity Motorcycle Run benefiting **Give Kids The World** and the EDUtour at **Fun Spot America** in Orlando.

Another EDUtour is set for **DreamWorks Land at Universal Studios Florida**, on Monday, Nov. 18.

The Opening Reception is set for Tuesday, Nov. 19. Specific industry receptions will be offered Wednesday evening, Nov. 20.

IAAPA Celebrates will be held on Thursday evening, Nov. 20. Attendees will be able to enjoy an exclusive event at Walt Disney World's EPCOT, complete with some of the favorite Disney attractions.

For 22 years, the Legends Panel at IAAPA Expo, moderated and

► See IAAPA, page 8

What's new at the IAAPA Expo 2024

IAAPA Expos Street Market — Located in the North Concourse: This unique area will showcase new exhibitors who are ready to dazzle taste buds with live demos and tastings of an array of culinary delights and innovator cocktail concepts.

IAAPA Expo Haunting Grounds — Located in the North Concourse: Uncover innovative exhibitors ready to help enhance guest engagement and boost your revenue by elevating a spooky Halloween theme. Learn how to create a haunting good time that leaves your guests excited for more!

Digital Signage Innovation Lab by DSF — Located in the North Concourse: Explore the latest in digital signage advancements from the **Digital Signage Federation** (DSF). Not only hear from digital experts who'll speak to real-world use cases. Attendees will have the ability to source products from the industry's best-in-class providers of display and software solutions.

Monopoly: IAAPA Edition with an Attractions Twist — Grab an IAAPA Expo Insider Booklet and the game begins. Interact with leading global manufac-

turers and suppliers on the trade show floor while enjoying the favorite classic board game.

The All-New Drone Show, sponsored by Sky Elements — Located outside the Orange County Convention Center: On Tuesday, Nov. 19, at 6:15 p.m. and 8:05 p.m., and again on Wednesday at 6:15 p.m., look to the sky for an all-new, jaw-dropping drone show sponsored by **Sky Elements**. This spectacular display might just break another **Guinness** World Record, but attendees will need to be at IAAPA Expo to witness history in the making. Don't miss the chance to experience this awe-inspiring aerial performance.

Global Professional Development Center — Located in the South Concourse: Stop by to learn smart strategies for career success. Explore IAAPA's comprehensive portfolio of products, services and certification programs.

Innovation Stage — Located in South Concourse: Make it over to hear the latest industry announcements and platinum sponsors share their expertise and groundbreaking innovations.

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# IAAPA Expo's EDUtalks offer ways to transform business strategies

The EDUtalk Stage, located in the South Concourse, is designed for impactful 20-minute discussions in a casual setting to hear about the latest trends, innovations and best practices happening within the attractions industry.

A sampling of some of this year's EDUtalk sessions include "Become a Happier Leader and Create a Bigger Impact," "Off Duty Employee Conduct: What Rights & Obligations Do Employers Have To Take Action," "Where Happiness Inspires Hope — Learn What's New at Give Kids The World," "Going Green: What Do Attractions Industry Employers Need to Know as States Across the Country Legalize Cannabis," "Extending the Experience: Enhancing Attractions with Interactive Walkthroughs," "Immersive Onboarding: Creating a Culture that Emphasizes Employee Retention and Engagement" and "Creating Waves: A Conversation about Surf."

Others include "How to Create your Perfect Pitch," "Attractions Industry is Attracting Capital: How Do I Maximize My Company's Value?," "Incident Reporting: The Concierge Approach," "Food & Beverage Program: Going Above and Beyond," "From Ideation to Award Winning: Stories from IAAPA Award Winners" and "Music and Sound: The Key to Supercharging Your Storytelling."

•iaapa.org



Bob Weis



Margaret Chandra Kerrison



Joe Pine

## IAAPA Continued from page 6

curated by **Bob Rogers**, CEO and chairman of **BRC Imagination Arts**, has been a cornerstone for sharing essential knowledge from creative leaders. Dedicated to preserving the invaluable wisdom of the theme park and themed entertainment industry's great achievers, this annual panel returns at IAAPA Expo 2024 on Wednesday, Nov. 20, from 4 to 5:30 p.m. in the Learning Hub, sponsored by **Miral**.

This year's panel features three extraordinary talents who embody **Ralph Waldo Emerson's** words: "Do not go where the path may lead;

go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

The panelists include **Bob Weis**, who has a career that spans over four decades as an Imagineer, most recently as the president of **Walt Disney Imagineering**. Weis has created, and designed Disney attractions around the globe. He also is a book author. His latest is *Dream Chasing: My Four Decades of Success and Failure with Walt Disney Imagineering*.

Another panelist is **Margaret Chandra Kerrison**. She was born in Indonesia and raised in Singapore. Her career spans over 16 years of creating narratives and writing for television, film, digital media, games, brand

storytelling, location-based entertainment, narrative placemaking and immersive experiences, including *Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge*, *Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance*, *National Geographic Base Camp*, and the **NASA Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex**. She has written several books.

The third panelist is **Joe Pine**, author, with **James Gilmore**, of *The Experience Economy*, a best-selling classic, embraced by readers and companies worldwide and read in more than a dozen languages. Pine also is an international speaker and management advisor to Fortune 500 companies and start-ups alike.

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# Schedule and event highlights for Orlando's IAAPA Expo 2024

**Saturday, November 17**

- 4 to 9 p.m. — IAAPA Rookies: FEC 101

**Sunday,  
November 17**

- 7:45 a.m. to 6 p.m. — IAAPA Institute for Attractions Professionals
- 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. — 14th Annual IAAPA Charity Motorcycle Run benefiting Give Kids The World
- 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. — 21st Annual IAAPA International Charity Golf Tournament
- 5:30 to 10 p.m. EDUTour: Fun Spot America

**Monday, November 18**

- 7 to 11:15 a.m. — EDUTour: DreamWorks Land at Universal Studios Florida
- 8:30 a.m. — EDUSessions, EDUTalks and Solution Spotlight begin and run throughout the day
- Lunch and Learn: Qiddiya – SEVEN Story, Transforming the Industry with Groundbreaking Attractions
- 2 to 5 p.m. — A special event will be held called, Zoos and Aquarius Community Experience
- 4 to 8:15 p.m. — EDUTour: Behind-the-Screens of Halloween Horror Nights
- 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. — Zoos and Aquariums Reception
- 5 to 6:30 p.m. — Food and Beverage Op-

erators' Reception

- 5 to 6:30 p.m. — Water Park Operators' Welcome Event
- 5:30 to 7 p.m. — Museums and Science Centers Reception
- 6 to 7:30 p.m. — Family Entertainment Centers Reception
- 7 to 10:30 p.m. — Legends: A Hall of Fame Celebratory Affair

**Tuesday, November 19**

- 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. — IAAPA Leadership Symposium - Breaking Down Silos
- 8:30 a.m. — EDUSessions, EDUTalks and Solution Spotlight begin and run throughout the day
- 9 to 10 a.m. — Opening Ceremony, Opening of the trade show floor follows
- 10 a.m.-6 p.m. — **Trade Show open**
- 12 to 2 p.m. — Learning Luncheon
- 6 to 8 p.m. — Opening Reception
- 6:15 to 6:30 p.m. — IAAPA Expo Drone Show, Sponsored by Sky Elements
- 8 to 9:30 p.m. — Young Professionals Reception
- 8:05 to 8:20 p.m. — IAAPA Expo Drone Show, Sponsored by Sky Elements

**Wednesday, November 20**

- 8:30 a.m. — EDUSessions, EDUTalks and Solution Spotlight begin and run throughout the day

- 8:30 to 10 a.m. — Leadership Breakfast
- 10 a.m.- 6 p.m. — **Trade Show open**
- 12 to 2 p.m. — Learning lunches
- 6 to 7 p.m. — Carnival and Showmen's Reception
- 6:15 to 6:30 p.m. — IAAPA Expo Drone Show, Sponsored by Sky Elements
- 6:30 to 8 p.m. — Latin America Fiesta and Europe, Middle East, African Reception take place
- 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. — Water Park Social

**Thursday, November 21**

- 6:30 to 9 a.m. — 18th Annual IAAPA Footprints from the Heart 5k Fun Run and 1 Mile Walk
- 8:30 a.m. — EDUSessions, EDUTalks and Solution Spotlight begin and run throughout the day
- 8:30 to 10 a.m. — Asia Pacific Breakfast and Brazilian Breakfast/Café da manhã brasileiro, Learning Breakfasts
- 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. — **Trade Show open**
- 12 to 2 p.m. — Learning Lunch (FEC) and Legal Roundtable
- 8 to 11:30 p.m. — IAAPA Celebrates

**Friday, November 22**

- 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. — **Trade Show open**
- 11 to 11:45 a.m. — Out of this World Ride Simulation Experiences
- 1 to 1:45 p.m., Designing Digital Signage for Guests Accessibility



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List is current as of October 15, 2024. For last-minute changes, booth additions and cancellations, consult IAAPA Connect+.

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| 22Miles  | NC9247 |
| 29 Tonight, Inc.                                     | 3142   |
| VR 360 Action  | 4089   |
| 3DCrystal  | 6108   |
| Battle Start   | 4510   |
| VR eSport Arena                                      | 886    |
| A & A Global Industries                              | 824    |
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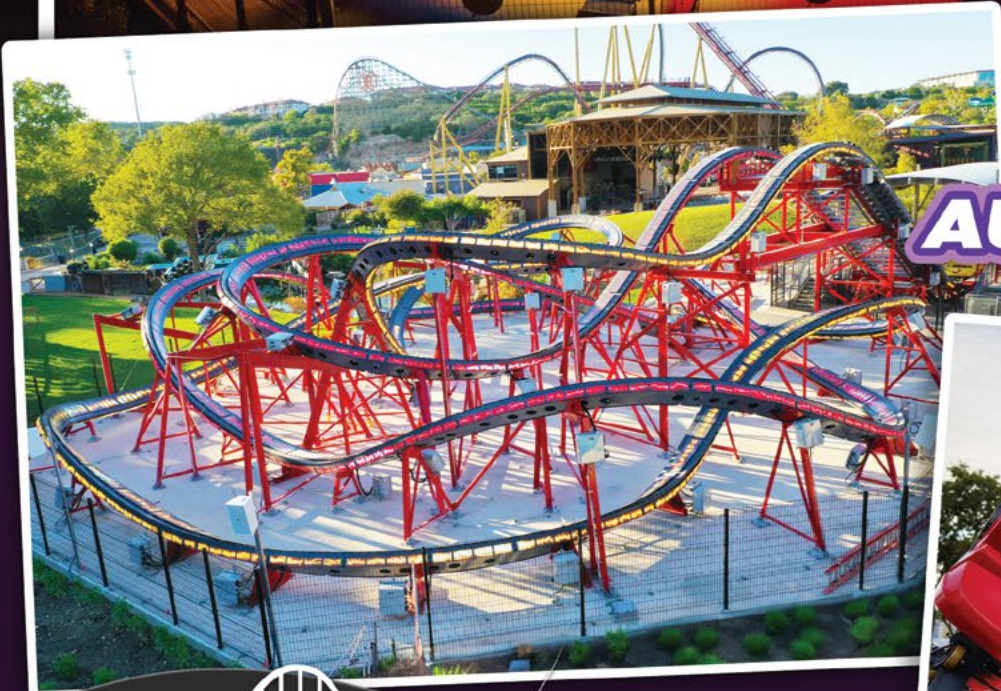
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# PARKS, FAIRS & ATTRACTIONS

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## Drayton Manor, Intamin surprise guests with innovative Gold Rush

AT: Tim Baldwin

tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

T A M W O R T H , Staffordshire, England — Family coasters are all the rage, but at times, a park (partnered with an eager manufacturer) will come up with something rather distinct. Such is the case of **Drayton Manor**. Its latest project with **Intamin** takes an innovative approach to the family coaster idea.

Gold Rush opened in late July. The launched family coaster keeps visitors guessing. The reason is riders don't know until they are dispatched as to what their roller coaster ride will be like. To say the track length of Gold Rush is 1,945 feet long doesn't really tell the complete story, as the ride lasts around two minutes — and it is a constant surprise.

What makes it unique is that two different experiences are possible when



Gold Rush is the anchor attraction to the new Frontier Falls section of the park. COURTESY DRAYTON MANOR

passengers climb aboard. Difficult to explain, the roller coaster has three focal points. From the station, the ride dispatches to a tire-driven lift hill. Further in the layout, a themed shed makes for surprising twists as well. One cycle carries

riders over the top of the lift as a traditional coaster would, but once the train reaches the shed following many twists and turns, passengers are launched out backward. Once back at the lift hill (now climbing the hill in reverse), rid-

ers plunge forward again through the same section they just experienced. Once back in the shed, they are launched forward to a different section of track. If riders get the opposite scenario, before ascending over the top of the lift,

the train suddenly drops backward, where switch track sends the train traveling to the shed, which in this case is launched forward. In all, 2,650 feet of track is traversed.

Inside the shed, a voice calls out from the smoky theming: "Oh no. You've taken a wrong turn. Get out while you can." From there, riders are sometimes launched forward and sometimes backward, which makes rerides more fun.

Which ride is experienced is up to the ride operator with the flick of a switch. In an Intamin release, it states the operator can vary the ride experience opting for one sequence in the morning hours and a different



Because of the innovative approach to Gold Rush, park guests climb the lift hill in both forward and backward directions. While aimed at families, directional changes and snappy curves offer thrills to riders of all ages. COURTESY DRAYTON MANOR

► See GOLD, page 26



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Experience 1

1. Train leaves station and travels forward over the lift towards gravity run.
2. After show/stop, train is launched backward towards lift.
3. Train travels up the lift backward, before going over the top, train gets released and boosted slightly to re-run the gravity run previously done backward, this time forward.
4. When arriving to the show building, train is launched forward without stopping.
5. Train finish the gravity run forward towards block brake and back to station.

Experience 2

1. Train leaves station and travels forward up the lift.
2. Before going over the lift, train gets released and slightly boosted backward towards the show building.
3. After show/stop, train is launched forward to re-run the gravity run previously done backward, this time forward towards lift.
4. Train goes over the lift forward, towards gravity run.
5. When arriving to the show building, train is launched forward without stopping.
6. Train finish the gravity run forward towards block brake and back to station.

To understand the two different ride experiences, the layout is described in this graphic with arrows showing the varying directions of travel. COURTESY INTAMIN

►GOLD  
Continued from page 24

later in the day. Drayton Manor did not respond to *Amusement Today* in how it is choosing to offer the innovative attraction to its guests — scheduled experiences or surprise dispatches.

Even with the unpredictable surprises, the coaster is marketed toward families. At its highest point, it is 56 feet tall and reaches a top speed of 37 mph.

Two trains seat 24 people each. The front of the trains features a shovel and pickaxe to carry the mining theme.

Gold Rush is the anchor attraction to a new rethemed area of the park called Frontier Falls, a recreation of the romanti-

cized, rugged Wild West. Other attractions in the area have been reimagined to give the land a cohesive feel. Blasting Barrels, a spinning flat ride, and Sheriff's Showdown, a shooting dark ride originally installed in 2000 and recently rethemed, opt into the western vibe. Falls Theater, featuring a Looney Tunes 4D film, is also in the land, as is The Haunting, a Mad House that opened in 1996.

The theming in the area features Old West store facades, barrels, wooden fences and a concentrated effort to create a 19th century feel to the walkways.

The coaster uses space located from a removed drop ride called Apocalypse. Gold Rush has been two years in devel-

opment. An Easter egg in the queue is a tombstone dedicated to Apocalypse for those that enjoy the insider humor.

Crates and barrels decorate the station, and overhead lights shine brightly in upside-down buckets. Riders will notice dynamite in the shed.

For a family ride, Gold Rush is one of the most creative and innovative installations introduced this year.

In addition to Frontier Falls and Gold Rush, the park also reimagined its 1994 standup roller coaster to Wave, with new sitting trains from ART Engineering for the 2024 season.

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# New Hampshire's Santa's Village takes a midnight ride with Vekoma

**AT:** Tim Baldwin  
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JEFFERSON, N.H. — Retiring a beloved attraction can be difficult, but **Santa's Village** has hit a home run with replacing an aging family attraction with a better one. The previous roller coaster was a Tivoli coaster called Rudy's Rapid Transit.

"Rudy's was getting old. The metal was fatiguing. It was still a completely safe ride, but we wanted a more up-to-date coaster that could accommodate more of the people who come to our park," said **Christian Gainer**, who prefers his title be 'happy elf' above all others. "We wanted a coaster that could fit smaller people as well as larger people at the same time. Rudy's was originally built in 1981. The long and compact cars were hard to get into. We wanted to make sure we could get more families on our roller coaster."

The new replacement is a family coaster from **Vekoma** called **Midnight Flyer**.

"We started out looking at eight different ride manufacturers," Gainer told *Amusement Today*. "I managed to travel around the United States to sample those manufacturer's rides. We were told and promised by multiple manufacturers: 'This is what we can do for you.' But Vekoma was more certain in what they could give us. They were willing to put down everything on paper."

Gainer said a key factor in selecting Vekoma was that it was the only manufacturer that put into writing that the park could operate the coast-

er in below-freezing temperatures — an impressive 13 degrees Fahrenheit and above. This satisfied the park because of the Christmas season and all the way up to New Year's Eve.

"With the Vekoma coaster, this is the largest coaster out there that will accommodate a 36-inch child," Gainer noted. "And the restraint system can accommodate individuals over 300 pounds. That was a big deal for us."

The train seats 20 riders. "The best part of our new roller coaster is that on our second run, we had an 87-year-old great-grandfather riding with his 4-year-old great-grandson. That was just perfect," Gainer said.

While technically not a custom version, **Midnight Flyer** is the only layout of its kind in the U.S.

"The layout for **Midnight Flyer** (the 'Horus' model) is the evolution of the highly successful '335' layout from the '90s and 2000s, which is one of the most successful family coaster layouts in history, with more than 25 installations all over the globe," said **Ricardo Tonding Etges**, North American Sales, Vekoma. "The 335 needed upgrades and a modern look, and that's how the new model came to life. **Midnight Flyer** presents family-friendly elements and a consistent pace throughout the layout, with a butter-smooth experience. The drop is unique, there is a station fly-by and several twisted airtime elements."

**Midnight Flyer** stands 41 feet tall and reaches speeds of 25 mph. The sleek ride



**Midnight Flyer is the newest attraction at Santa's Village. The new coaster from Vekoma is taller, faster and longer than the aging roller coaster it replaced.**  
COURTESY SANTA'S VILLAGE

paces over 1,148 feet of track. In contrast, the previous ride was only 26 feet tall and was slightly shorter in length with less speed.

"For a small roller coaster, it's just massive," said Gainer. "The large track and heavy-duty supports and the paint job just conveys strength."

A bright green track on black supports differentiates the traditional red-and-green color scheme throughout the park. For management, they feel it conveys the speed of Santa who has to travel around the world at nighttime. Those colors reflect the Northern Lights.

According to Gainer, guest response when asked about the two coasters is that people appreciated the one they grew up with, but they are very happy with the change.

"The target demographics of **Midnight Flyer** is the same as its predecessor,



Rudy's Rapid Transit," added Tonding Etges. "However, the park was interested in a new family coaster experience with modern-age elements, smoother ride experience and slightly taller and faster — all of that while reducing the rider height requirement from 39 inches to 36, in order to allow even more kids and families to experience the ride. With **Midnight Flyer** I believe we

ticked all the boxes."

"It has overwhelmingly been a huge success," beamed Gainer. "The one surprise is everyone gets off the coaster and says, 'Oh my gosh. That was so smooth.' It satisfies all ages. We have yet to have a rider [turned away]."

"Over the years, we have also implemented several new technologies and methods to create not only reliable and safe rides, but also extremely smooth and innovative coasters, consistently," Tonding Etges told AT.

"I really enjoyed working with Vekoma," Gainer emphasized. "From start to finish, there has been clear communication, and they made sure we progressed at the pace we needed to be going at in order to achieve our goal of opening at the beginning of the season. They really guided us through the project and made it fun and engaged with our team. I can't wait to do business with them again."



**The new family coaster has been praised for its smoothness. A cute decoration of an elf holding on to the back car gives the train a sense of whimsy (above right).** COURTESY SANTA'S VILLAGE







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# Paultons Park unveiling the first Gameplay Theater: Ghostly Manor

ROMSEY, U.K. — Ghostly Manor is set to become the first installation of Mack Rides' and Lagotronics' Gameplay Theater when it's installed at Paultons Park in the United Kingdom. This revolutionary interactive dark ride combines an endless ride system, immersive media scenes, decorative scenes and innovative interactive technology and is scheduled to open in May 2025.

The Gameplay Theater is an interactive dark ride that transports visitors through a series of scenes combining large projections with highly themed decorative scenes and numerous special effects. With each turn on its axis, the vehicle reveals a new world to explore, providing a story-driven experience that is both immersive and exciting. The Gameplay Theater has been designed to provide an exceptional amount of fun and a high capacity on a relatively limited surface.



Mack Rides, Lagotronics Projects, Leisure Expert Group and Themics have combined their efforts to bring the first Gameplay Theater attraction to life in May 2025. Dubbed "Ghostly Manor," the interactive ride promises immersive fun when it debuts at Paultons Park in the U.K. COURTESY LAGOTRONICS

The Gameplay Theater ride concept has been designed and developed by Mack Rides in close cooperation with Lagotronics Projects for integrating interactive technology, AV, lighting and special effects. Leisure Expert Group contributed its creative expertise to Ghostly Manor by developing the storyline and designing the scene sets and entrance area. Themics

is also working diligently to create captivating theming that enhances the ride's immersive atmosphere.

Paultons Park is one of the most popular family theme parks in the U.K. Located in the New Forest National Park in Hampshire, it offers over 70 rides and attractions. The new ride will be housed in the former 4D cinema building. The exterior of Ghostly Manor will pay homage to

the original Paultons Manor that once stood in the gardens of Paultons Park. The theming and storyline adds a layer of historical charm to the new attraction, connecting it with the park's rich heritage.

In Ghostly Manor, guests follow the adventures of the renowned ghost hunter Dr. Kinley, who is on a mission at the North Pole to find the elusive ice ghost. In his absence, he has

invited guests to explore his manor. However, soon they will notice that many ghosts have escaped. Equipped with a special designed interactive device called "Phantom Phaser," guests need to capture all ghosts throughout the manor to secure them once again. As guests shoot ghosts in each scene they accumulate a score which can be viewed at the exit of the ride.



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# SeaWorld Orlando announces innovative Arctic Flying Theater

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ORLANDO, Fla. — SeaWorld Orlando is once again pushing the boundaries of immersive experiences with the announcement of a first-ever Arctic-themed flying theater attraction, set to open in spring 2025.

The groundbreaking Arctic Flying Theater promises to be a dynamic, multi-sensory journey through the Arctic, blending entertainment with education. With custom filming equipment capturing never-before-seen Arctic vistas and wildlife like beluga whales, orcas, and walrus, this fully immersive ride is designed to transport guests across icy landscapes and beneath frozen waters.

The attraction will consist of dual multi-level theaters, each with a capacity of 30 guests, and boasts a four-minute and 30-seconds experience. A key feature of the attraction is its accessibility for younger audiences, thanks to a 39-inch height requirement, ensuring families can enjoy the adventure together.



The new Arctic Flying Theater delivers innovative technology along with SeaWorld's commitment to high-quality, cinematic storytelling, merging awe-inspiring visuals with an educational message. COURTESY SEAWORLD ORLANDO

What sets the new attraction apart from other motion simulators or flying theaters is SeaWorld's commitment to high-quality, cinematic storytelling, merging awe-inspiring visuals with an educational message. The flying theater will provide not only a bird's-eye view of the Arctic but also underwater perspectives, showcasing the delicate ecosystems and vast landscapes of one of the planet's most remote regions.

It is designed to complement SeaWorld's



broad mission of conservation education, offering a fun yet informative way to connect

visitors with the wonders of the Arctic.

The attraction will be located on the site of the

now-vacant show building for the defunct Wild Arctic Attraction, a helicopter-themed motion simulator ride that "transported" guests to "Base Station: Wild Arctic" from 1995 to 2020.

The announcement of the attraction also underscores SeaWorld's continued focus on offering family-friendly experiences that combine thrills with a purpose.

"We are thrilled to introduce this first-of-its-kind attraction to SeaWorld Orlando," said Jon Peterson, president of SeaWorld Orlando. "This indoor immersive flying theater experience reinforces our commitment to education, animal care and research. As guests disembark from the attraction, they'll find themselves in the awe-inspiring wonder of one of the world's most remote

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► See ARCTIC, page 33





The theater is designed to complement SeaWorld's broader mission of conservation education, offering a fun yet informative way to connect visitors with the wonders of the Arctic. COURTESY SEAWORLD ORLANDO

## ►ARCTIC

Continued from page 32

places, face-to-face with some of those very animals found within the Arctic such as beluga whales, walruses and more. By bringing the wonders of the Arctic to life, we are offering

guests an unparalleled and immersive experience that will create lasting memories for people of all ages."

The addition of the attraction reflects SeaWorld's ongoing efforts to remain a leader in the theme park industry, blending cutting-edge

technology, conservation messaging and family-focused fun. With the debut of this Arctic flying theater, SeaWorld Orlando continues to enhance its reputation as a premier destination for innovative and educational entertainment.

The announcement of a flying theater attraction also fulfills SeaWorld's ongoing commitment to delivering an innovative major attraction investment annually and follows the successful launch of three roller coaster attractions, Penguin Trek (2024), Pipeline: The Surf

Coaster (2023), and Ice Breaker (2022).

Additional information about the attraction is expected to be revealed during IAAPA Expo 2024 in Orlando, promising further insights for industry insiders into this first-of-its-kind project.

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# Six Flags Great America, B&M to unleash record-breaking "Wrath"

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GURNEE, Ill. — In 1990, Bolliger & Mabillard (B&M) was an unknown company. Six Flags Great America took a chance on the fledgling firm and opened Iron Wolf, a standup coaster. The relationship between Six Flags and B&M was established from that point forward. While that original project is no longer at the park, Six Flags Great America has announced that it will partner with B&M for a sixth time in 2025.

Standing at 180 feet tall, Wrath of Rakshasa will be the park's second-tallest roller coaster. Following projects from B&M in various genres — standup, inverted, hyper, flying and wing — this new thriller will be a dive coaster. It will feature two records on such a ride: steepest drop (96 degrees) and most inversions (five).

Wrath of Rakshasa will give the park 16 roller coasters, five of which are from B&M, a record tied with sister park Six Flags Great Adventure and SeaWorld Orlando.

"Working with B&M over the years has allowed us to bring record-breaking, iconic roller coasters to our park. Their commitment to innovation and quality aligns with our mission to deliver world-class thrills to our guests," said John Krajnak, park president. "This being the fifth coaster at Six Flags Great America is a testament to our long-standing collaboration and shared vision for pushing the boundaries of what's possible in the industry. We're thrilled to continue our partnership and deliver the kind of thrills and excitement our guests have come to expect."

Three trains seat 21 riders in three rows of seven. As dive coasters are known to do, the signature feature of the genre is the hold brake at the top of the tallest precipice, which will position riders face-first to the ground. Once the plummet begins, trains rush at 67 mph over 3,239 feet of track.

"When it comes to ride



Wrath of Rakshasa not only sets new records for a dive coaster but also ties the record for most B&M coasters at a single park: five. The ride's five inversions will be the most on any B&M dive coaster. COURTESY SIX FLAGS

placement, we're always looking ahead and evaluating plots of land that are, or will be, available," Krajnak told *Amusement Today*. "We identified this particular location as a prime opportunity, and it fits perfectly into our long-term vision for the park. Taking advantage of the site near Demon not only maximizes the space but also creates a thrilling synergy between two iconic attractions. By grouping them together, we're enhancing that area of the park, making it a true hub of excitement."

"When coming up with concepts for the new ride, we wanted something that would not only stand out but also tie into the rich, dark history of our popular ride, Demon," added Rachel Kendziora, communications. "Wrath of Rakshasa was the perfect fit — drawing from mythical demon lore to create a backstory that complements the ominous feel of the area with both attractions. The theming will carry that dark energy, offering guests an immersive experience where they can face the fury of an ancient force. It's a roll-



er coaster that's as intense in story as it is in thrills."

Unlike most of its brethren, Wrath of Rakshasa does not feature a mid-course block brake. It is all-out action.

"Wrath of Rakshasa is designed to push the limits of what a dive coaster can offer," said Kendziora. With the steepest drop of any dive coaster at 96 degrees and a record-breaking five inversions, this coaster is all about

delivering top-notch thrills. And without a mid-course brake run, we've ensured that the intensity never lets up — every second on the track is packed with adrenaline. It's a ride that redefines what our guests can expect from a coaster experience."

Dive coasters have a signature element of a hold brake right at the edge of its tallest precipice. Once released, riders plummet 171 feet down the 96-degree

vertical drop.

"I'm excited about more than just the coaster itself. Wrath of Rakshasa is a project I've been deeply involved with from the very beginning," Kendziora told AT. "I've had the privilege of helping shape its name and theming, so seeing it all come to life is incredibly rewarding. The fact that it sets new records and has such an immersive, dark storyline makes it even more special."



**Bay Beach Amusement Park**, Green Bay, Wisconsin, has received a \$2.4 million grant from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to address environmental degradation and the loss of wildlife in the area.

The money will go toward constructing a wildlife viewing platform and a walking path along the shore of Lake Michigan. As a result, residents and visitors to Bay Beach will have more fishing posts, waterfront access and wildlife education opportunities.

**Adventure Landing**, Jacksonville, Florida, has gotten another reprieve from closure.

The popular family-oriented amusement and water park will remain open through 2025, allowing it to celebrate its 30th anniversary after receiving an extension of its lease, Adventure Landing officials announced in a news release.

Park officials said the Adventure Landing team is dedicated to exploring future opportunities to expand its presence in the Jacksonville area, including plans to develop another water park location. They also said they are committed to remaining a popular fixture in the community and to carrying forward a legacy of providing family-friendly entertainment.

As the 2024 season came to an end, **Liseberg**, Göteborg, Sweden, focused on engaging senior citizens.

This group, according to park officials, is typically reached through communications centered on afternoon tea dances and flower

exhibitions. However, the park wanted to change the perception of how older adults are viewed in advertising and communication.

For example, officials focused on the fact that seniors are pleasure seekers with high expectations for entertainment and excitement. And they aren't afraid of challenges.

So came the idea of "70 is the New 17." That theme was brought to life in the Super Seniors campaign, centered around a world record attempt designed to attract media attention.

Earlier in 2024, Liseberg officials called for adventurous seniors to join an attempt to break the world record for the highest average age on a roller coaster. The previous record, set in 2003 at **Blackpool Pleasure Beach** in the U.K., was 75.25 years.

Park officials were overwhelmed by the response. More than 200 seniors from across

Sweden signed up for the chance to be part of the event. These brave seniors boarded Valkyria, Europe's longest dive coaster, and set the record, achieving an average rider age of 80.1 years.

South Korea's retail giant **Shinsegae Group** announced it has partnered with U.S. media group **Paramount Global** on a \$3.39 billion international theme park project.

Shinsegae Inc. said its affiliate **Shinsegae Hwaseong** will lead the project that involves creating a 4.2 million-square-meter complex in Hwaseong, Gyeonggi Province, just under 28 miles south of Seoul.

Shinsegae Hwaseong is a special-purpose company majority-owned by **Shinsegae Property Co.**, which runs the conglomerate's **Starfield** shopping complex in Korea.

The park is expected to open in 2029.

In December 1997, Nashville's beloved **Opryland USA** closed down. More than 26 years later, people from across the country traveled to Middle Tennessee to bid thousands of dollars on memorabilia from the iconic amusement park.

From artwork to furniture to antiques, **Michael Jordan**, co-owner of **Treasure Trust Estate Sales**, said it was very special to come across this kind of memorabilia.

The sale was held Oct. 10 in Gallatin, Tennessee, just north of Nashville. The price tags were high, but attendees were allowed to place silent bids. People were even able to call in bids if they couldn't make the sale in person.

## Park Post-its



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# Six Flags New England goes steampunk for Quantum Accelerator

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AGAWAM, Mass. — **Six Flags New England** will open its newest coaster in 2025, giving the park a complete dozen. Quantum Accelerator will be a launched straddle coaster from **Intamin**, the same company that supplied the park's award-winning *Superman The Ride*.

"The development of this ride has been a multi-year process," said **Pete Carmichael**, park president. "After exploring a number of different options, we wanted to make sure that we picked the perfect new thrill ride for our park. That is why we are so excited to partner with Intamin on this project to deliver a new thrill coaster that will really provide a 'WOW' factor for our guests."

"Quantum Accelerator is the first dual launch straddle coaster in New England and the first launch coaster at Six Flags New England," said **Ray Sciarretta**, marketing manager. "As coaster technologies advance and change, we try to stay as innovative as possible in providing the most thrilling ride experiences for our guests. A launch coaster was something missing from our lineup of already incredible coasters and is an addition to the park that everyone will enjoy whether they are a thrill seeker, coaster enthusiast or just getting into roller coasters."

The straddle seating

has riders positioned side by side in jet ski-style configurations. Many of the maneuvers are close to the ground, with the highest point being 59 feet. The two trains seat 16 riders each.

"While this coaster will be family-friendly, make no mistake that it is going to be a mega-thrill machine!" Carmichael told *Amusement Today*. "We have worked with the coaster designers to ensure that the maximum thrill experience will be delivered for this ride design providing a fun and unique experience for all ages."

The track length is 2,600 feet.

"One of our primary goals was to build a coaster that wouldn't just be fun today, but also fun 20, 30 even 50 years from now!" Carmichael said. "Quantum Accelerator will become a family tradition for our guests to ride together for generations to come. This coaster will be fast, exhilarating, and most importantly, it will be fun! It will be the kind of coaster that will make you want to jump back in line right after you ride it."

"It also is different than the more traditional coaster style of climbing up a lift hill, the train of Quantum Accelerator will be launched out of the station sending riders speeding into the adventure immediately," added Sciarretta.

The layout is very tangled, curving over and



The tallest point of Quantum Accelerator is 59 feet (above). Heavy banking (below) makes for a fun experience in the trains that feature straddle seating. COURTESY SIX FLAGS NEW ENGLAND

under itself numerous times.

"For Quantum Accelerator being compact and twisted, it allows Six Flags New England to take advantage of the entire footprint of the ride's field and fill the entire space with the ride track," said Sciarretta. "With Quantum Accelerator being over 2,600 feet of track, there will be a lot of high thrill moments as the train twists its way through the ride including high-speed turnarounds, low-banking curves under the track, and over-90-degree tilted twists over the track."

The ride is designed to produce 11 moments of airtime. The top speed is 45 mph. During the course, a second launch keeps the thrills coming. The coaster



features tire-driven launches.

As an addition to the Crackaxle Canyon western section, the ride will create a steam-punk layer to the thematic fit. This was previously seen at sister park **Six Flags Fiesta Texas** to noted success.

"We couldn't be more excited to tell the story of Professor Screamore testing his latest invention in his workshop in

Crackaxle Canyon," said Carmichael. "The ride's station, queue line, ride vehicles, and themed elements throughout will bring this story of the new steampunk machine launching into time and space to life!"

"The steampunk vibe will fit as a new element of theming in Crackaxle Canyon at Six Flags New England. During Fright Fest, the area actually becomes our Screampunk haunt zone, so some of the elements already exist in that area," Sciarretta told AT. "This new theming allows us to expand that out of Fright Fest and into our daily operation. It gives us an opportunity to start to add more theming elements into the area and help bring the wild west of Crackaxle Canyon into an alternate future where steam technology prevailed."

Quantum Accelerator will give Six Flags New England 12 roller coasters.



Quantum Accelerator will be loved for its intertwined, twisted layout. Designed for families, the Intamin launched coaster will still satisfy thrill seekers. COURTESY SIX FLAGS NEW ENGLAND





# Andretti's debuts its second new-for-2024 North Texas location

**AT:** Tim Baldwin  
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FORT WORTH — Talk about speedy drivers. Appropriately so, **Andretti's** is in the fast lane. The chain of family entertainment centers has opened three new facilities in 2024. Already underway are five locations in 2025 and two in 2026 (that the company has shared). Just two months after the location in Grand Prairie opened in North Texas, the latest opened just 30 miles to the west in Fort Worth on September 25.

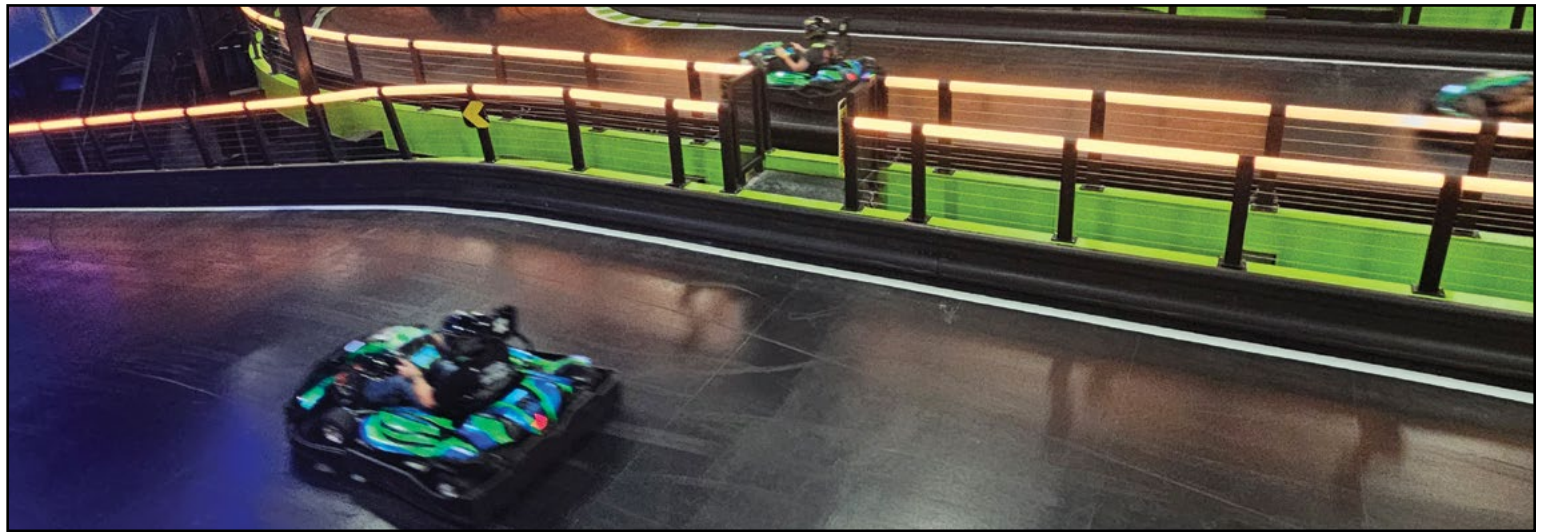
"It speaks to us. We think Texas is one of the best states in the U.S.," said General Manager **Austen Schoensee**. "It's really about the community and the families in the area. We've been blessed with The Colony location (2020), and it has been so successful. We wanted to branch out to the other DFW markets."

Schoensee is confident the three Dallas-Ft. Worth locations are spread apart enough that they don't compete for the same audience.

"We're also taking into account the group side of things. Different businesses and corporations want to come out and host events with us. We're able to accommodate them in each zone," said Schoensee.

He notes the Grand Prairie location has a burgeoning entertainment market and also has other entertainment options in nearby Arlington. He hopes for the Fort Worth location to be a leader in the entertainment industry in his community.

"With all the growth in the northern Fort Worth area, we don't have anything like this out here," said Schoensee.



Karting (above) at 35 mph is the big draw at Andretti's locations. More than 200 games (below left) greet visitors to the Andretti's Fort Worth location. Brunswick supplied Spark bowling (below right), which is duckpin bowling with projected games on the alleys for additional fun. AT/TIM BALDWIN



"We're hoping to fill that gap."

Like all Andretti locations, each property has a distinct track layout for its go karts. The new location also offers local craft beers that the other North Texas locations don't. Every Andretti's location has its own unique architectural storefront as well.

The go kart tracks are the flashiest draw to the facility. The junior track caters to ages 7 to 11 years old. Drivers must be 48 inches. The vehicles go 15 mph. The intermediate track is a step up, going 25 mph. Drivers on it must be from 12 years up to a driver's license or 18. The adult track is for anyone who owns a

driver's license or is 18. Those go karts go 35 mph. Both the intermediate track and adult track use the same vehicles; only the speed is different.

An observation platform lets spectators enjoy views of the races.

"We have a Mini Mario track for ages 4 to 6," said Schoensee. "You have to be 36 inches, but they get to drive by themselves. They go 5 mph, so we offer something for all ages."

The facility hosts a wide variety of fun options. Among them are four racing simulators. According to the website verbiage: "It's so realistic that you actually feel the motion and vibrations of the car, experience the tension in the seatbelt, and hear the sounds of the racetrack. The panoramic screens put you in the middle of the action and take your gaming to a whole other level."

These simulators are of the same design that professional race car drivers use. The racing simulators use full-motion actuators to generate the feeling of driving an actual race car at top speeds

on some of the best tracks in the world. This is an experience that was not included at the Grand Prairie location.

There is two-story laser gaming theater with numerous scenarios, Spark bowling from **Brunswick** and virtual reality with **Hologate** and **Hyperdeck**.

The arcade portion has the latest state-of-the-art games. About 200 games with close to 250 player positions offer a wide variety. **Embed** provides the cashless gaming system. Most of the attractions are redemption based.

Food is a major component of the Andretti's experience. Gourmet burgers, popular appetizers and hand-helds such as steak amoroso hoagie and sweet chili glazed shrimp po'boys offer delicious choices. Chef-crafted entrees include sizzling carne asada and shrimp queso fajitas, Cajun chicken pasta and panko-breaded shrimp.

"When I think of arcades or amusement parks, I don't think of the food we offer. We have mahi-mahi tacos," said Schoensee. "We have a

Rucker burger with cream cheese and jelly sauce. When you look at our menu, there's something for everyone. We have Impossible Burgers for vegetarians."

The catered events can offer many elevated offerings from carving stations to flaming donuts. Six party rooms are available for rent, as well as the larger Mario Suite.

The facility has provided numerous jobs for the area.

"After our job fair, we employed 325," Schoensee told *Amusement Today*. "For a busy day, we need about 200 employees. It's about 30 team members on the tracks per shift."

The Fort Worth facility is around 100,000 square feet. Visitors can pay as they play specific experiences or save with bundled packages.

"I love that we are family based and faith based. We're here to provide the experience for families coming out, and we really want to knock it out of the park for them, whether it be from the service side or leading the industry of amusements side," Schoensee said.



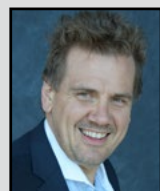
A full bar and elevated food options make for a complete night out. AT/TIM BALDWIN



## Spree adds VR Playground to Munich's SuperFly



MUNICH, Germany — Spree announced the successful installation of its innovative VR Playground at the SuperFly Trampoline Park in Munich, Germany. The attraction is an immersive gaming environment designed to cater to kids and families. Unlike traditional VR games, the VR Playground emphasizes active movement, encouraging players to jump, run and interact with the virtual world. Since its launch, the VR Playground has recorded more than 3,000 game plays in the first month alone — an exceptional milestone reflecting the growing popularity of Spree's family-friendly, active movement-focused VR experiences. COURTESY SPREE



## FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRAL

AT: John W.C. Robinson  
jrobinson@amusementtoday.com

The **International Adventure and Trampoline Park Association (IATP)** Annual Conference, held at **Margaritaville Beach Resort** in Hollywood, Florida, was an overwhelming success, drawing industry professionals from across the globe for three days of education, networking and collaboration in a relaxed beachside setting.

Attendees were treated to a packed schedule of educational sessions, featuring a dynamic mix of expert competitors engaging in insightful panel discussions, as well as interactive roundtables that encouraged lively debates and idea sharing. The level of interaction and the diversity of topics made each session highly engaging and relevant for professionals at all stages of their careers.

The Trampoline Court Inspection (TCI) Training Course took attendees offsite to a local park for hands-on learning about safety and industry standards. **Off the Wall** allowed IATP to use its facility for the in-person training session. TCI attendees continued to follow the equipment and maintenance track that included educational sessions to prepare them to take the Level 1 exam.

**Alley Cats Entertainment** recently shared that all three of its family entertainment centers now offer **Embed's** Mobile Wallet feature, the only **Apple** and **Google**-certified FEC solution, making the gaming experience smoother and more convenient than ever.

The new technology allows customers immediate digital access to their game card directly from their smartphone, providing instant visibility of their game balance and ticket count.

**Chuck E. Cheese** and the world-famous **Harlem Globetrotters** announced an exciting new collaboration that will bring together the two iconic properties. The first-of-its-kind collaboration will leverage a new family sports and entertainment platform developed by the two entertainment brands that will seamlessly blend the worlds of basketball and joyful play.

Just in time for the highly anticipated Harlem Globetrotters 2025 World Tour, presented by **Jersey Mike's Subs**, this partnership will engage millions of fans and families through the Chuck E. Cheese extensive in-store media network, featuring over 3,000 screens across 470 locations across 45 states. With experiential activations planned during 250 of its domestic tour stops, families will experience unique promotions and original content designed to spark joy, excitement and unforgettable experiences with both brands, reaching millions of kids and families.

"It's a thrilling new chapter for Chuck E. Cheese, and we couldn't be more excited to partner with the world-famous, Harlem Globetrotters," said **David McKillips**, president and CEO of **CEC Entertainment**, the parent company of Chuck E. Cheese. "This collaboration allows us to introduce the exhilarating sport of basketball to young fans and families in a fun and engaging way. We're committed to creating unforgettable experiences that resonate with fans and partners."

**Intercard** has installed its latest cashless technology at **Tiki Adventure Zone** in Port Orange, Florida. Formerly known as **Go Kart City**, the popular outdoor family fun park has undergone an extensive makeover under new owners **Dean Park** and **Ethan Pepper**. The facility reopened on October 1 with six different go-kart experiences, mini-golf, bumper boats and batting cages. Guests can also enjoy a refreshed arcade with 25 of the latest games, powered by an Intercard cashless system. Intercard's **Saul Scribner** did the installation on-site in June 2024.

Intercard was also chosen to manage the state-of-the-art arcade at **Advent Health Sports Park at Bluhawk** in Overland Park, Kansas. The 200,000-square-foot facility bills itself as the premiere venue in the central United States for traveling sports teams, tournaments and local youth sports play. An in-house FEC provides entertainment for visiting sports teams as well as local residents. The park opened in October 2024.

The 6500-square-foot arcade consists of 75 games provided by **Shaffer Distributing**, a **Triotech** XD dark ride eight-seat simulator and a **Rollglider** aerial ride above the game floor. Next to the arcade are multiple lanes of bowling from **Brunswick Bowling**.

"Our Intercard system will manage the games as well as access to the Rollglider and Triotech attractions," said **Scott Sherrod**, CEO of Intercard. "It also integrates with the Brunswick Sync system for the center's 16 bowling lanes, making it easy for guests to enjoy a variety of activities with one card."

**Meow Wolf** is adding learning opportunities to its immersive art experiences. Through the company's new education guides, guests can explore, discover and engage in ways never previously possible. Meow Wolf has released learning guides that offer an insightful approach to engaging with its multisensory exhibitions through the lenses of environmental, life and computer science. These guides are available to everyone for free.

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# Favorable weather, NAME midway leader to the biggest Big E ever

**AT: Ron Gustafson**  
Special to Amusement Today

WEST SPRINGFIELD, Mass. — **The Big E** set an all-time attendance record of 1,633,935, thanks to favorable weather during its 17-day (Sept. 13-29) run. "It was a marvelous fair and we were flooded with sunshine," **Eugene Cassidy**, president and chief executive officer of the **Eastern States Exposition (ESE)** and home to **The Big E**, told *Amusement Today*.

"Last year we were flooded with rain, but we had some great days this year," he noted.

Saturday, Sept. 21, marked the largest single day in the history of **The Big E** with 178,608 passing through the turnstiles.

"We had seven record days," Cassidy said of fairgoer response, which allowed the expo to eclipse its previous attendance mark of 1,629,527 set in 2019. "Like a farmer, we had a big harvest."

Other single record days for attendance were Sept. 14: 121,854; Sept. 17: 58,996; Sept. 20: 99,912; Sept. 22: 148,297; Sept. 23: 86,673; and Sept. 24: 79,852.

The only day impacted by rain was the final Thursday, Sept. 26, with 48,078 persons attending.

**NAME on the midway**  
**North American Midway Entertainment (NAME)** fielded 49 rides, including its 150-foot **Bussink Super Wheel**. The mammoth ride requires 20 tractor-trailers to move it over the road and has 36 climate-controlled gondolas with a capacity of six persons per carriage.

Other featured attractions included **Sky Screamer** and **Star Dancer (Technical Park)**, **Wave Swinger (Preston & Barbieri)**, **Himalaya** and **Starship 4000 (Wisdom)**, **Skater (Zamperla)**, **Zipper**, **Pharaoh's Fury** and **Century Wheel (Chance Rides)**, **Ring of Fire (Larson)** and **Super Cyclone Coaster (Interpark)**.

Kiddieland had more than a dozen rides with a **Chance Rides** double-decker carousel a highlight.

**NAME** has held the midway contract at **The Big E** for 20 consecutive years.

All-day ride wristbands were \$35 with a \$30 pre-sale special valid Monday



This giant alligator float (above) was a new featured attraction in the daily Big E Parade. The giant Ferris wheel (below) welcomed guests to the NAME midway at The Big E. COURTESY EASTERN STATES EXPOSITION

through Friday. Individual ride credits were 50 cents each with attractions requiring nine to 21 credits.

"The midway itself had a great year, and the Super Wheel has become an iconic piece in our rides presentation," **NAME's** Corporate Marketing Director **Lynda Franc** said.

Cassidy also commented on the midway operation saying, "They were up 31 percent over last year, which was not a good year due to rainy weather. We're really happy with **NAME** as they have great rides, great staff and a really fantastic product."

## Entertainment a hit

**The Big E** adopted the theme of "United We Fair" for its 2024 edition and carried it over to its popular "Circus Spectacular" under the big top, tagging this year's venue as **Circus United**.

In regard to the selected theme, Cassidy said, "The country is so disunited.



We believe that fairs across America bring people together, and I always say the fair is a reflection of the American way."

**Circus United**, with general seating included with fair admission, featured acts from around the world such as jugglers, clowns, acrobats and human cannonballs. **Ringside** seating was available for \$10.

The circus has been a staple at the annual exposition since 1955 and presented three shows daily in its new custom big top theater. Fair officials report that 80,000 guests see the show annually.

Major concerts were also hit in **The Big E Arena**.

"**Big Time Rush** on closing night was huge," the

► See **BIG E**, page 43



The sun sets on the midway at the 2024 edition of **The Big E** in West Springfield, Mass. COURTESY EASTERN STATES EXPOSITION



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**CARNIVALS****►BIG E****Continued from page 42**

fair official noted. "All of our arena shows were sellouts."

Other acts included legendary rock band **America** with special guest **Jim Messina**, Christian artist **Phil Wickham**, **Public Enemy** and country duo **Brothers Osborne**. Concert tickets ranged from \$49 to \$69, which included fair admission.

The free **Court of Honor** stage had a variety of acts, including classic rock and roller **Chubby Checker**, **Average White Band**, **Debby Boone**, **The Kentucky Headhunters**, **Quiet Riot**, **Andy Kim**, **Herman's Hermits** starring **Peter Noon** and **Wang Chung**.

American rock band **Hinder** brought in a standing-room-only crowd on the last night of The Big E.

**Much more**

Admission to the fair was \$16 pre-sale online and \$20 at the gate. Kids 6 to 12 were \$10 pre-sale and \$12 at the gate. An every-day pass sold for \$70.

Daily parades throughout the ESE grounds, along with cultural demonstrations and entertainment in the **Storowton Village Museum**, are also part of The Big E's annual experience.

Many fairgoers visit the **Avenue of States** where replicas of each New England state's original statehouse sit on a tract of land owned by that state. The buildings are packed with products and services unique to each New England state.

Agriculture is also front and center during the expo with numerous 4-H and Future Farmers of America competitions, shows and exhibits. The Farm-A-Rama building hosted pigs, piglets, beekeepers, goats and The Hobby Knoll Clydesdales.

ESE events continue throughout the fall and winter with information at [easternstatesexposition.com](http://easternstatesexposition.com).

The 2025 edition of The Big E is slated for Sept. 12-28.

•[thebige.com](http://thebige.com)



Classic rock band America performed in The Big E Arena to a sold out audience (above left). This thoroughfare at The Big E was crowded with fairgoers (above right) during the evening Mardi Gras Parade. COURTESY EASTERN STATES EXPOSITION

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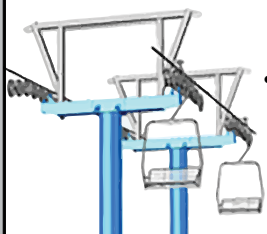


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Fair staff tout Wright's for rotating the rides they bring each year, creating an always fresh and new feel..  
COURTESY EASTERN NEW MEXICO STATE FAIR

## Eastern New Mexico State Fair runs on multiple volunteers, few paid staff

AT: B. Derek Shaw  
bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

ROSWELL, N.M. — “The weather was absolutely perfect for the 2024 Eastern New Mexico State Fair,” Leslie Robertson, office manager, commented, pleased with the outcome. “The temperature was in the upper 80s/lower 90s throughout the week, with no rain. While we are still compiling data, early numbers indicate we had participants from all 33 of New Mexico's counties.”

There were 48,000 attendees to the six-day fair, which was down slightly from 2023. The theme of the 102nd edition was “The Greatest Show in New Mexico.”

Elbert, Colorado-based Wright's Amusements brought 24 rides, half of which were kiddie ones. A giant swing ride was new to the fair, as well as an elephant ride (Kolmax Plus).

The most popular rides were easy for Robertson to comment about. “The new swing ride (Park Rides Lamborghini) was a favorite; the Himalaya (Wisdom Rides

of America) is a fair staple—always in demand and the kiddos always lined up for the tiny pirate ship ride. Wrights does a great job of rotating the rides he brings each year, so the carnival is always fresh and new.”

“John [Ring] and his [Wright's Amusements] crew do an amazing job at the fair. They came in early to ensure everything was safe, clean and welcoming,” said Robertson. “They share our values and offered times specifically for our livestock families living on grounds for the week and a morning for our special needs participants to enjoy the carnival without the general public being present. This allowed our mobility-challenged guests extra time to load and unload from the rides and our sensory-sensitive children smaller lines to wait in.”

The carnival grossed roughly \$400,000.

Robertson described what sets this fair apart. “The Eastern New Mexico State Fair is unique in its managerial make-up. The fair is almost exclusively volunteer-

based. Board members and superintendents are all volunteers who give their time and energy to host the best fair possible. Our admission ticket takers are all families of local high school band students. A percentage of the admissions go to the band students to support their programs. The Eastern New Mexico State Fair is board-owned. It is not supported by tax dollars with the exception of a portion of tourism tax dollars generated from tourist drawing events. The Board is committed to offering a big event full of education and entertainment. The formula has worked.”

Special promotions included partnering with the carnival on Tuesday to offer the “Ride ‘Em Cowboy” special. For \$25 at the front gate, the price included admission and an unlimited all-day carnival armband. This was a great savings for larger families.

On Thursday the fair partnered once again with the carnival along with local food banks for a canned food drive. For every two cans of food fairgoers brought, they received a carnival armband for \$25. This represented a nice savings from the standard \$40 price.

The fair operates on a \$5,000 advertising budget that is exclusive to newspaper, radio, and billboard media buys.

One of the new food vendors this year was Krab King, a food truck, offering crab, lobster, shrimp and



Perfect weather for the Eastern New Mexico State Fair yielded 48,000 attendees to the six-day event.  
COURTESY EASTERN NEW MEXICO STATE FAIR

► See NEW MEXICO, page 46



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## NICA Member Mixer at 169th Bloomsburg Fair



**BLOOMSBURG Pa.** — After closing one evening at the 169th Bloomsburg Fair, the National Independent Concessionaires Association (NICA) organized a member mixer behind Royer's Concessions on the midway. Bary Bunts, Secretary of the Brandon, Florida, organization and owner of The Apple Cart, (far right) is talking with those concessionaires who gathered that evening. He provided NICA updates, along with prizes, snacks and fellowship with fair staff and concessionaires. This was the first time the event has been held in Bloomsburg. NICA, now in its 31st year, is a membership-driven organization dedicated to strengthening relationships with the fair, festival and special events industries through effective communication, benefits, education, leadership and solutions. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

## ►NEW MEXICO

Continued from page 44

various gourmet butters. The "carnie" from **Roadrunner** food truck was a crowd favorite. It consisted of a basket of waffle sweet potato fries smothered in hamburger, bacon, pineapple, cheese and garlic aioli sauce. Being in New Mexico, the fair prides itself on having the best Mexican food trucks. They included **El Chupecabra**, **Tacos Pita**, **Tacos y Tortas** and **Ricos Tacos**.

The crowd was entertained by Rocketman **Chachi Valencia**, one of the few human cannonballs left in the country. He soared over attendees in the entertainment area as they enjoyed the 15 scheduled concerts along with a beer garden. On stage, musical acts included **Rick Trevino**, **Conjunto Azabache**. A hypnotist was also part of the entertainment package. The third annual **Pecos Valley Stampede Ranch** rodeo took place on the grounds.

There were no employment challenges as Robertson explained: "Since we are primarily volunteers and families working for their

children's school activities, employment isn't typically an issue. The handful of us in paid positions have been on board between five and 30 years."

The fair measured what impact local establishments got from those who stayed part or all of the week in Roswell. "Surveys reflect 82% of livestock families stayed in hotels or RV parks, purchased fuel, and dined in local restaurants while participating in the fair," said Robertson.

The Eastern New Mexico State Fair now has its first female president of the board at the helm. "Congratulations to **Adriann Ragsdale** and her team of board members for hosting another safe, well-attended fair," said an enthusiastic Robertson.

In earlier years, the event was known as the **Chaves County Cotton Carnival**. In 1950, the annual celebration became the Eastern New Mexico State Fair and started to be held at the fairgrounds. The mission of the fair is to represent family, tradition and education. The next edition takes place September 28 through October 4, 2025.

•enmsf.com



## MIDWAYSCENE

AT: B. Derek Shaw

bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

The **Washington State Fair**, Puyallup, which ran August 30 to September 22 had a Remembrance Gallery that honored a grim history. During World War II, thousands of Japanese Americans were incarcerated there. The memorial consisted of both a gallery and museum exhibit inside the grandstand. There was an illuminated white wall that contained the names of more than 7,500 people who passed through. Digital interactive panels explained the history of the fairgrounds along with oral accounts from survivors.

"We had nothing to do with this conflict, but just because we looked like the enemy, we were treated like the enemy," Mary Abo, 84, told **Natalie Newcomb** with NPR affiliate, **KUOW**. She was 2 years old in 1941 when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Abo, along with her sister, **Alice Hikido**, who is now 91 and their parents were forcibly removed from their Juneau, Alaska, home and incarcerated at the Washington State Fairgrounds.

"There are a lot of lessons here for the current generation," said Hikido. She hopes fairgoers "have an awareness of people standing up for and speaking out for social justice and so things that happened once before don't happen again."

The Remembrance Gallery will also operate during events throughout the year when the Expo Hall is in use.

**Kissel Entertainment** is the first traveling provider to be sensory-inclusive, certified by **KultureCity**. The certification debuted at the **Kentucky State Fair**, the first state fair to have this certification.

This accreditation ensures that individuals with sensory needs can fully enjoy events. "Becoming sensory inclusive certified was extremely important to us, not only professionally, but personally," said **R.A. Kissel**. "This certification ensures that everyone, regardless of their sensory needs, can partake in the fun and excitement of our fairs and events comfortably and safely."

As part of the certification process, staff underwent training from medical and neurodivergent professionals to recognize and assist guests with sensory needs and manage sensory overload situations. The midway operator now provides sensory bags equipped with noise-reducing headphones, fidget tools, strobe reduction glasses, VIP lanyards, visual cue cards and weighted lap pads. These resources help mitigate sensory overload and enhance the fair experience for individuals with sensory sensitivities.

"It is a great honor to know we are the first traveling entertainment provider to receive this certificate, and we encourage our industry peers to prioritize this for their own events," said Kissel.

The Department of Agriculture for the **Commonwealth of Pennsylvania** has been passively collecting data from fairgoers this entire season. Posters were placed throughout many of the 106 fairs across the state designed with a QR code that took fairgoers to a survey. Many fairs also made PA announcements throughout their grounds, encouraging people to scan the QR code. Questions included which fair they were attending, what town and county they were from and how much they spent on admission, entertainment, souvenirs, food, lodging and travel to that fair. The survey, called "Understanding the Economic Impacts on Visitors to Pennsylvania Fairs," collected data that measures each fair's impact on the state and local economy.

The 2024 **Georgia-Carolina State Fair**, Augusta, Georgia, was canceled due to the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. There was damage to structures on the fairgrounds.

The **Richmond County Sheriff's Office** did not have enough available resources to support security at the fair, along with the recovery efforts they were doing throughout the Augusta area.

There were also concerns about power restoration and safe water in time for the October 18 to 27 fair run. **Strates Shows** had the contract.

**Fair Park** in Dallas, Texas, and the local **Dallas City Council** are involved in a dispute after there have been allegations that \$5.7 million donated to the park have been misspent. As a result Dallas City Council members want changes.

The president of **Oak View Group** (OVG260), the for-profit who manages Fair Park for the City of Dallas, told council members he disputed the findings. "Fundamentally, we don't agree with the report and the \$5.7 million misallocation," said **Greg O'Dell**, the president of venue management, Oak View Group 360.

Fair Park is home to the popular **State Fair of Texas**, but the fair itself is not involved in the dispute.

"We are saddened by the recent news regarding our home, Fair Park. We want to reiterate to the public that the State Fair of Texas is in no way involved in the dispute between **Fair Park First**, OVG360, and the City of Dallas," said fair officials in a prepared statement. "The State Fair of Texas is a private not-for-profit organization that is a tenant in Fair Park. The State Fair operates under a lease agreement with the City of Dallas. Our hope is that this dispute will be resolved quickly in the best interest of the future of Fair Park and our surrounding community."



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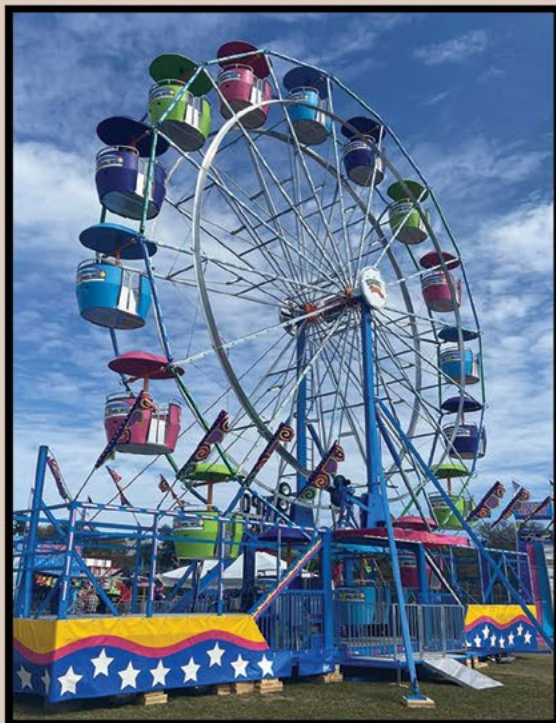


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# The Largest Carnival Trade Show in the USA



# Positive weather was on the side of the 2024 Dutchess County Fair



Powers Great American Midways shines during an evening run at the Dutchess County Fair. COURTESY R.D. THOMAS



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**AT: Ron Gustafson**  
*Special to Amusement Today*

RHINEBECK, N.Y. — The 178th edition of the Dutchess County Fair, which ran from August 20 to 25, 2024 had the weather on its side.

“We had a very successful and uneventful week,” **Andy Imperati**, president and CEO of the fair, told *Amusement Today*.

Recognized as the second largest county fair in New York State, Imperati noted that “picture-perfect weather” was the driving factor in bringing out crowds. Though no 2024 attendance figure was available, published reports said the fair generally draws around 300,000 guests.

**Powers Great American Midways** (PGAM) was again the provider of 40 mechanical rides, numerous games, food and novelty concessions and other attractions. “We were up a little from last year,” show owner **Les (Corky) Powers** said of the carnival's revenue.

All-day ride wristbands were \$30 pre-sale and \$40 at the fair. The carnival also offered individual ride tickets on reloadable cards.

General admission was \$13.50 pre-sale for adults and \$18 at the gate, with kids 11 and under free. Wednesday featured a \$12 gate for seniors and military personnel.



Sky Hawk (left) took riders high above the midway. COURTESY R.D. THOMAS

“We consider PGAM to be one of the most highly rated midway providers in the country,” Imperati said. “We are fortunate to have a great relationship with them.”

Featured rides on the main midway were Freak Out and Khaos (KMG), High Flyer and Sky Hawk (ARM), Swing Buggy (Bertazzon), Pharaoh's Fury (Chance), a Larson International Fireball themed as Inferno, Wave Swinger (Zierer), Genesis (Wisdom), Scooter (Majestic) and Itsy Bitsy gondola wheel (AMC). A complete kiddieland operated in another area of the fairgrounds with numerous rides for children.

In entertainment, rock-n-roller **Rick Springfield** (\$45 pre-sale and included fair admission) drew the largest audience for a paid

act, according to Imperati.

“All of our shows were well-attended, including **Dialed Action** (motorsports and BMX stunts) on closing day,” the fair official added.

Free entertainment included Kiss tribute show **KissNation**, Jimmy Buffett tribute act **Bluffett** and **Commerford's Petting Zoo**.

The **Dutchess County Agricultural Society**, which presents the fair, and PGAM purchased a 1,400-pound steer at Saturday's Youth Livestock Sale. Meat from the animal's sale will be donated to the **Red Hook Responds Meal Program**, a prepared meal agency of the food bank system within the Red Hook and Rhinebeck communities.

The 2025 Dutchess County Fair is slated for August 19 to 24.

•dutchessfair.com



Khaos (above left) was one of the spectacular attractions at the Dutchess County Fair. Itsy Bitsy gondola wheel (above middle) was a popular ride presented by PGAM. Pharaoh's Fury swings high above the fair's midway (above right). COURTESY R.D. THOMAS



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# WATER PARKS & RECREATION

► Splash Adventure opens Slidewinder — page 52 / News Splash — page 53

## Georgia's Margaritaville transforms Lanier Islands Water Park

AT: Jeffrey Seifert  
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

BUFORD, Georgia — This year, the transformed **Fins Up Water Park** reopened with an exciting new lineup of slides and an exciting new look. The multi-million-dollar enhancement project includes Georgia's first water coaster. The rebranding to a Fins Up is the first in the United States following the original Fins Up Water Park in Nassau, The Bahamas.

The major addition was a new slide tower featuring four slides supplied by **WhiteWater West** of Richmond, British Columbia, Canada. The tower sits atop a natural hillside, giving the slides the advantage of using the terrain. The centerpiece, **Apocalypso**, is a Master Blaster and Boomerango fusion that starts out as a water coaster and then finishes with the iconic near-vertical wall of the Boomerango, giving riders that coveted zero-gravity sensation.

Three more slides include **Serpentine Storm**, **Dreamside Dive** and **Mango Mania**. **Serpentine Storm** is a giant AquaTube, **Tailspin + Rattler** fusion that includes an enclosed tube section highlighted with translucent effects, including multi-color vertical stripes and jagged edge patterns.



The resort offers the Fins Up Water Park along with sandy beaches. The Wibit Aquatic Adventure course (inset) can be seen just offshore. COURTESY MARGARITAVILLE AT LANIER ISLANDS

**Dreamside Dive** is an open flume with alternate aqua, blue and orange sections that winds its way off the tower and down the hillside. **Mango Mania** is a completely enclosed flume that starts off with sections in varying shades of mango-like colors, then changes to dark sections punctuated with translucent special effects, including bright circular rings and colorful circles. All three of these slides utilize two-person rafts, although single riders are permitted on the double tube.

**Apocalypso** starts with a drop right off the tower, followed by a signature Master Blaster uphill blast. The blast leads into a darkened wind-

ing section. As riders emerge into daylight, they are surprised by a steep drop that leads into the Boomerango, where their speed carries them up the near-vertical wall until they lose momentum, enjoy a bit of zero-gravity, and then slide back down the wall into the runout zone.

The addition of four new slides brings the total slide count to 15, several of which were refurbished or recoated as part of the makeover.

The water park enhancement also included new premium cabanas, new food and beverage offerings, new retail stores and an expanded **Wibit** Aquatic Adventure obstacle course. The **Wibit**

floating obstacle course is out on the lake and participants are required to wear life jackets.

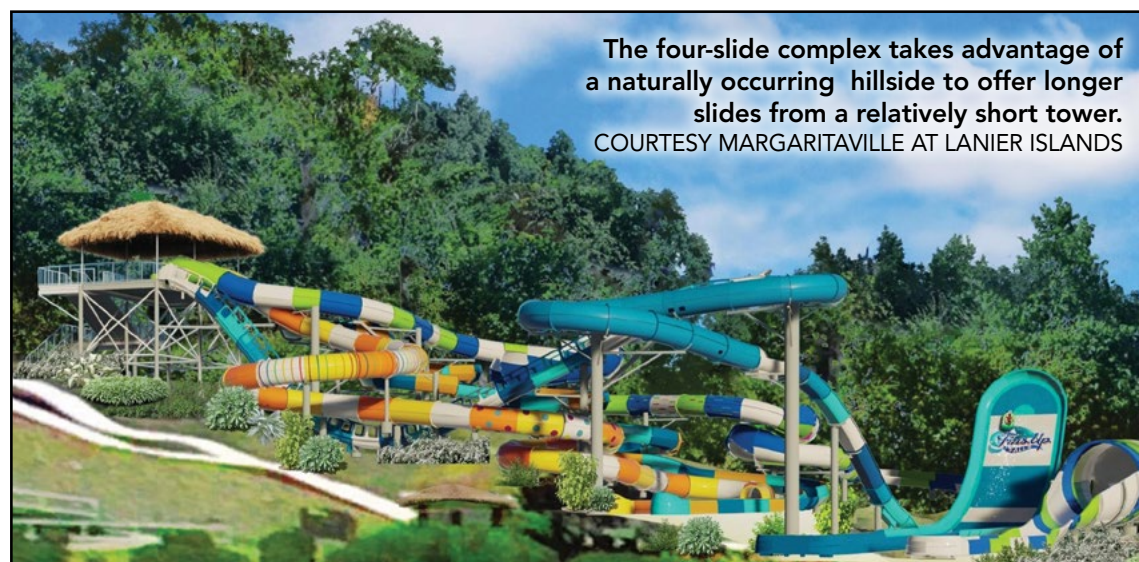
Lake Lanier was formed in 1957 when the construction of the Buford Dam flooded the Chattahoochee River valley. Soon after the new lake was filled, several resort areas were developed that included boat docks, horse stables, beaches, a golf course and a hotel. A water park was built in 1987.

**Margaritaville at Lanier Islands** was created in 2018 when the **Lake Lanier Islands Management Company**, which owned several resorts along the lake, made a deal with **Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville**

**Holdings LLC** to develop a resort.

**Margaritaville at Lanier Islands** is a complete resort offering camping, a marina with boat rentals, Lake Lanier excursions, paddleboard/kayak rentals, golfing, hiking and walking trails, the Fins Up Water Park, along with restaurants including the signature **LandShark Bar & Grill** found at several locations. Accommodations at the camping resort include RV hookups, glamping tents and lakefront cabins. There's even a fully outfitted RV rental for those wishing to try out the RV experience without having to own one. **Camp Margaritaville** offers complimentary Wi-Fi, guest laundry, golf cart rentals, an upscale bathhouse and more.

As part of the enhancement, **Camp Margaritaville** added several new family-friendly features, including a swimming pool, pickleball courts, a playground, a new pavilion and a dog wash station.



The four-slide complex takes advantage of a naturally occurring hillside to offer longer slides from a relatively short tower. COURTESY MARGARITAVILLE AT LANIER ISLANDS



**Apocalypso's uphill water blast** is a first in the state of Georgia. COURTESY MARGARITAVILLE AT LANIER ISLANDS



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# Splash Adventure opens Slidewinder from ProSlide Technology

AT: Jeffrey Seifert  
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

BESSEMER, Alabama — This past summer Alabama Adventure & Splash Adventure added a new waterslide to its growing water attractions offerings. Slidewinder, a Mammoth from ProSlide Technology of Ottawa, Canada, was the focal point of the largest park expansion in more than 20 years.

The original Mammoth was designed and built by ProSlide technology as the first fiberglass family raft waterslide. It made its premiere at Kings Island's WaterWorks water park in 1990 when the water park was in its second season. Despite the model having been around for nearly 35 years, it is still one of the best-selling group-rafting rides in the world and one of ProSlide's most popular offerings. In the 1990s, it garnered the company two of IAAPA's Brass Ring Awards. Its continued popularity is a result of the ability to customize the attraction with



From above, it's easy to see how the stacked figure-eight layout offers a lot of slide in a small footprint (above). The four-person cloverleaf rafts are brought to the top of the tower by a conveyor (top right). Loading and dispatch are simplified with the use of a moving conveyor belt (bottom right).  
COURTESY ALABAMA ADVENTURE & SPLASH ADVENTURE

a number of different curves and channel options including open, enclosed, translucent and dark. Although originally designed for a raft of four, newer versions can accommodate a raft holding six people.

"The ProSlide Mammoth has consistently proven to be a favourite among families around the world. Its ability to offer a highly interactive experience,

with four guests riding together, creates moments of shared excitement that parks love to deliver," stated Phil Hayles, ProSlide vice president, business development & strategic accounts. "With its impressive capacity, the Mammoth helps operators manage crowds efficiently

► See SPLASH, page 53



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## NEWS SPLASH

AT: Jeffrey L. Seifert  
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In August the city of Bloomington approved a tax subsidy for the multi-million **Mystery Cove** water park at **Mall of America**. The water park has been in development for several years but is expected to break ground next year with an anticipated 2027 opening.

A water park was first proposed back in the 1990s when the mall was still new. In 2006 a separate entity opened the nearby **Water Park of America**, but that facility was never associated with the mall. It was purchased by **Great Wolf Resorts** in 2017 and now operates as a **Great Wolf Lodge**.

Although design plans are still in flux, current plans show a 143,000-square-foot water park to be built on an old parking lot and connected to the mall through a skyway between **Nordstrom** and the former **Sears** building. Plans call for one of the largest open-air indoor pool buildings featuring a 52,000-square-foot wave pool, lazy river, splash pad and more than 30 slides and attractions. The hall is to be covered with an arched translucent roof that can be partially retracted.

The proposed **Therme Canada** on the site of **Ontario Place** is able to move forward after an Ontario court dismissed a lawsuit that challenged the water resort. The group, Ontario Place for All, had filed the lawsuit in an effort to keep the land at Ontario Place accessible to the public, instead of allowing outside enterprises to build private resorts. Therme Canada is a project of Austrian-based **Therme Group**, a wellness company with spas and resorts in Europe and Asia, with plans for several resorts in North America.

The proposed Therme Canada resort includes an indoor water park and thermal pools and is expected to cost CA\$350 million (US\$253.7 million). The new facility will cover most of the west island and include indoor and outdoor pools, a spa, waterslides, restaurants and a botanical garden. Outside of the facility, is a planned 12-acre public park and beach.

Ontario Place, located southwest of downtown Toronto, opened in 1971 as a combination exhibition center, theme park, entertainment venue and public park. It was famous for its Cinesphere — the world's first permanent **IMAX** theater installation. The theme park closed in 2012 and the park has been struggling ever since, particularly with its identity as to what it is and/or should be.

In August, groundbreaking took

place in Sioux City, Iowa, on the **Siouxland Splash Waterpark**. When the park opens next summer; it will include a 50-foot slide tower with multiple slides, a large interactive waterplay structure, a lazy river and an activity pool.

"We're really hoping that this project will spear some other development and bring other businesses into the area," said **Henk Kloppe** of **Frontline Development, LLC**. "And I think even housing developments; it would be great to see this side of town develop."

Siouxland Splash is planning to open during Memorial Day weekend in May 2025.

The **Palmer Aquatics Center** in Janesville, Wisconsin, is one step closer to becoming a reality. In August, the Janesville City Council awarded a contract to **JP Cullen**, a Wisconsin-based commercial construction company that started in Janesville in 1892. The \$3.4 million contract is to build a facility with a zero-depth entry pool with lap lanes and aquatic play features, a new pool building to house mechanical equipment, bathroom/showers, a staff area and concessions.

The new center replaces a 90-year-old wading pool that has been a fixture at Palmer Park.

Work is progressing on a new community and aquatic center in Mountain Home, Arkansas. Once complete, the \$38 million construction project will include a 30,000-square-foot convention center, multipurpose rooms, a fitness center with cardio and resistance equipment, a gymnasium, a 35,000-square-foot indoor aquatic center and another 35,000-square-foot outdoor aquatic area.

The gymnasium will include multipurpose courts lined for basketball, volleyball and pickleball, as well as an elevated track above the gym floor.

The indoor aquatic center will feature three pools — a therapy pool, a wading pool and a competition pool.

The outdoor area will have waterslides, a lazy river and a splash pad.

The pools are expected to be used by Mountain Home Public Schools' swim teams, which currently use private pools by local residents to practice for competition.

The project was funded by a temporary half-cent sales tax and a permanent quarter-cent sales tax that were both approved in 2021. The temporary sales tax will expire after funding bonds for the construction of the project are paid off.



Banking left (above) and right (below) on the curves is the signature move of the Mammoth waterslide.  
COURTESY ALABAMA ADVENTURE & SPLASH ADVENTURE



## ► SPLASH

Continued from page 52

while delivering fun for guests of all ages. For Alabama Splash Adventure, it was a must-have addition to enhance their family offering, making their water park an even more appealing destination for multi-generational visitors."

Splash Adventure's Slidewinder stands 48 feet tall and has adventurers sliding through 537 feet of open channel. Its stacked figure-eight layout offers a lot of slide in a compact footprint. The ride has compound curves, three of which are paired, to form a greater-than-180-degree U-turn. Water flow through the chute is 5,000 gallons per minute — enough to fill a residential swimming pool every two minutes. The four-person cloverleaf rafts are brought to the top of the slide tower via a conveyor, so guests do not have to carry their tubes.

**Steve Thomas**, general manager of Alabama Adventure & Splash Adventure told *Amusement Today*, "Slidewinder is a great addition to the park since a whole family of four can ride at the same time. It's a perfect family attraction for our family park."

Alabama Adventure has a colorful history dating back to 1998 when it opened as **VisionLand** with four themed areas, including Steel Waters Water Park. The park was built largely through the efforts of **Larry Langford**, a

long-time Alabama politician and visionary who was eventually convicted of bribery and public corruption and sentenced to 15 years in a federal penitentiary. The park went through multiple ownerships and in 2012, **General Attractions LLC** announced that only the water park would operate. It was given a new name, **Splash Adventure**. Throughout the years and ownership changes, many of the park's signature dry ride attractions were either sold off or fell into disrepair.

In 2014, the park was purchased by **Dan Koch** along with his sister **Natalie Koch**. Dan Koch had formerly served as CEO of **Holiday World & Splashin' Safari**. The duo breathed new life into the park, adding five rides the first year and restoring the park's signature wooden roller coaster, **Rampage**, which reopened in 2015. In 2018, in order to give more recognition to the dry rides at the park, it was renamed Alabama Adventure & Splash Adventure. The park still has two of its original waterslides along with the original lazy river. In 2003, an 800,000-gallon wave pool was added. Under the management of **Koch Family Parks**, several slides have been added from both **WhiteWater West** and **ProSlide** as part of an ongoing 20-year expansion plan that began in 2014. Prior to Slidewinder, the most recent addition was **Cocoa Island**, a multi-level interactive water play structure.



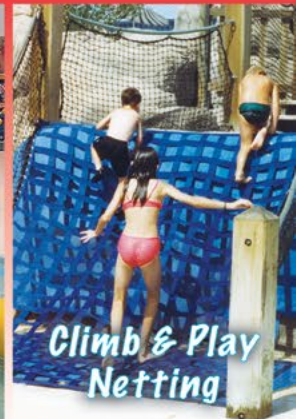
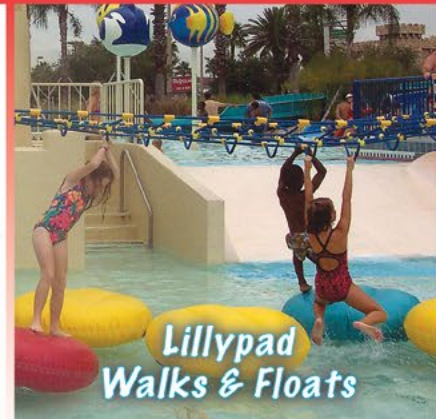
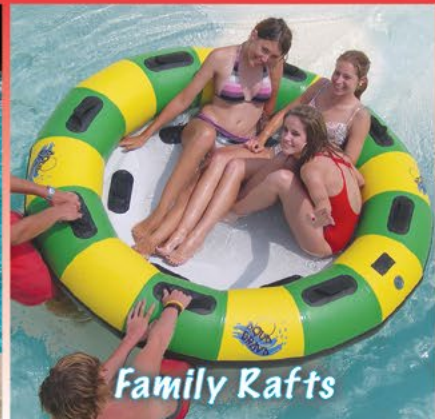


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# Congratulations

Holiday World & Splashin' Safari's Wildebeest earns Best Water Park Ride in the Golden Ticket Awards. 2024 marks the 13th time Wildebeest has received this global recognition — proof of the park's dedication to delivering top-tier water ride experiences. We're humbled and inspired by our long-standing collaboration. Here's to further innovation and milestones ahead!



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# BUSINESS & NEWSMAKERS

► Holiday World adds on-site staff accommodations — page 58 / 2024 Golden Ticket Awards recap — page 64

## Amsterdam hosts largest attended IAAPA Expo Europe in history

AT: Pam Sherborne

[psherborne@amusementtoday.com](mailto:psherborne@amusementtoday.com)

AMSTERDAM, The Netherlands — IAAPA Expo Europe 2024, the premier event for the leisure and attractions industry, ended on September 27 at the RAI Amsterdam with the highest number of registered attendees in the region's history. The event was held September 23 to 27, with the trade show taking place September 24 to 26.

Approximately 17,370 attendees came to connect with fellow professionals, share best practices and resources, explore the latest innovations and visit some of the Netherlands' facilities during the four-day conference.

IAAPA Expo Europe 2024 also welcomed a total of 13,195 qualified buyers, representing 11,529 buying companies and more than 680 exhibiting companies. This year's event surpassed EMEA's record for the largest trade show floor ever, taking over 18,000 square meters of the venue space.

"The attractions market in Amsterdam is one of the things that makes this city an

outstanding host," said **Peter van der Schans**, executive director and vice president for IAAPA Europe, Middle East, and Africa. "Its rich history of cultural landmarks that blend tradition with cutting-edge experiences makes Amsterdam the ideal setting for this event."

"The record-breaking success of IAAPA Expo Europe 2024 is a testament to the unwavering support of our members, partners, and exhibitors, and we deeply appreciate their commitment to our industry," he said.

The education conference, a hallmark of every IAAPA Expo, showcased an impressive lineup of 60 sessions with 200 speakers from 20 countries. These EDU sessions covered a broad spectrum of topics, including workplace culture, emerging trends, guest satisfaction, revenue optimization, safety, sustainability, best practices for small facilities and more.

"The magnitude of IAAPA Expo Europe continues to demonstrate the positive impact of our industry and how much we can learn from



2025's IAAPA Expo Europe trade show floor (above) featured 680 exhibitors and more than 13,000 buyers. The event's education conference included 60 sessions and 200 speakers (below). COURTESY IAAPA

each other," said **Jakob Wahl**, president and chief executive officer of IAAPA. "We are thrilled to see our community come together in person time and time again to exchange ideas and showcase the future of the attractions industry."

Among the highlights featured this year were some of the EDU tours offered, including the Indoor Entertainment Day that took attendees to **Ripley's Believe it or Not! Amsterdam**, **A'dam Lookout**, **This is Holland**, **City Center**, **Sherlocked**, **Madame Tussauds**, **Dungeon** and a reception at the **All Out**.

The tour of **Efteling** located in Kaatsheuvel also was a highlight, as well as **Safety Day at Walibi Holland** in Biddinghuizen (about 50 minutes east of Amsterdam). There also was the **Amsterdam Culture and Art - It's all about Rembrandt**, **Amsterdam Food**



and Beverage and **Amsterdam City Experiences**.

Educational sessions throughout the week ran the gamut, with all facets of the industry covered and presented by industry professionals.

The expo event also continued to feature a strong presence of the IAAPA Foundation. More than \$16,000 was raised through the sale of stroopwafels and a live auction

featuring industry-donated items, such as exclusive park visits, overnight stays and a dinner with **Andreas Andersen**, CEO, **Liseberg**, Sweden. In support of future talent in the attractions industry, IAAPA matched this amount, bringing the total to \$33,290.

Next year's IAAPA Expo Europe 2025 will take place September 22 to 25 in Barcelona, Spain.



The event raised more than \$16,000 for the IAAPA Foundation through events such as a live auction and a stroopwafel sale. COURTESY IAAPA

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# IAAPA announces inaugural IAAPA Expo Middle East in Abu Dhabi

AMSTERDAM, The Netherlands — IAAPA announced the launch of IAAPA Expo Middle East, set to take place from March 30 to April 2, 2026, at the **Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre** in Abu Dhabi, UAE. The announcement was made during IAAPA Expo Europe in Amsterdam.

IAAPA Expo Middle East will feature a vast exhibit floor showcasing the latest innovations and trends in the attractions industry. As with IAAPA's existing trade shows worldwide, this event will connect key industry leaders, offer educational sessions with expert speakers and provide behind-the-scenes tours, giving attendees exclusive insights into the industry.

By launching this new expo, IAAPA responds to requests from exhibitors, operators and other members to bring a world-class event with a strong education program, networking events and backstage experiences to the region. IAAPA Expo

Middle East will move to a new location within the region each year, ensuring comprehensive coverage and engagement across the entire area.

"We are thrilled to bring IAAPA Expo to the Middle East," offered IAAPA President and CEO **Jakob Wahl**. "This region is experiencing tremendous growth and innovation, and we are eager to support and elevate the industry here. Our expo will provide a platform for networking, learning and discovering new opportunities. We look forward to creating a valuable experience for all attendees and participants and are enthusiastic about hosting the very first edition of this annual event in Abu Dhabi."

Abu Dhabi has emerged as a leading destination in the attractions industry, fueled by recent investments in world-class projects. The city is home to **SeaWorld Abu Dhabi**, the first SeaWorld park outside the U.S., which opened in 2023, and the expansion



IAAPA President and CEO Jakob Wahl (left) and Mubarak Al Shamisi (right) of the Abu Dhabi Convention & Exhibition Bureau announced IAAPA Expo Middle East during September's IAAPA Expo Europe. COURTESY IAAPA

of **Wild Wadi Waterpark**, further solidifying its position as a hub for entertainment and leisure. Upcoming attractions — such as the highly anticipated **TeamLab Phenomena Abu Dhabi**, the **Guggenheim Abu Dhabi** and the **Natural History Museum** — are set to draw millions of visitors and elevate Abu Dhabi's global appeal. These developments are part of a broader strategy to position Abu Dhabi as a top cultural and tourism destination.

"We are thrilled to host the

first edition of IAAPA Expo Middle East here in Abu Dhabi, a testament to the city's status as a global hub for business, tourism and entertainment," added Mubarak Al Shamisi, director of the **Abu Dhabi Convention & Exhibition Bureau**. "The event will help boost collective economic growth and highlight Abu Dhabi's commitment to elevating and advancing the emirate's tourism sector, led by our Tourism Strategy 2030."

IAAPA Expo Middle

East promises to be a landmark event, offering unparalleled opportunities for networking, education and business development in the region. Attendees will have the chance to explore new products, meet with industry experts and gain unique insights into the latest trends and technologies.

"We are delighted to welcome IAAPA Middle East to Abu Dhabi. This event aligns with our vision of positioning Abu Dhabi and Yas Island as top global destinations for entertainment and leisure," stated **Mohamed Abdalla Al Zaabi**, CEO of **Miral Group**, the leading creator of immersive destinations and experiences in Abu Dhabi. "This event is a great platform that brings together the most influential industry leaders from across the globe, fostering collaboration and showcasing the Emirate's attractions, world-class theme parks and cutting-edge experiences."

## Multiple industry leaders elected to IAAPA Global Board

AMSTERDAM, The Netherlands — The **IAAPA** Global Board of Directors elected six new board members for 2025 during their meeting in Amsterdam. The board meeting took place in conjunction with IAAPA Expo Europe 2024, also in Amsterdam.

IAAPA's Global Board collaborates with the IAAPA team on the development of the trade association's strategic priorities. The board approves IAAPA's strategic priorities and annual business plans and oversees the association's finances. The board also advocates for IAAPA members and the industry in all board decisions and board members serve as global goodwill ambassadors.

The slate of new board members presented to the global board was developed by the IAAPA Governance Committee. The committee reviewed 35 applications for six open positions. They carefully evaluated and discussed each applicant and interviewed the top candidates for second vice chair and treasurer. They considered industry experience, areas of professional expertise, prior IAAPA volunteer experience, and the knowledge and skills needed on the board to effectively advance the association's strategic priorities.

"The extensive selection process was very comprehensive," said IAAPA Governance Committee chairman, **Amanda Thompson**, O.B.E., CEO of **Blackpool Pleasure Beach**, and president, **Stageworks Worldwide Productions**. "The new board members have decades of experience, are proven industry leaders, and I'm confident they

will effectively guide IAAPA into the future."

The new board members include the following: **Christopher Perry**, executive director of entertainment strategy at **Qiddiya Investment Company** has been elected IAAPA Second Vice Chair. He will serve in that role in 2025, then advance to first vice chair in 2026, chair the board in 2027, and serve as immediate past chair in 2028. Perry has worked extensively in the Europe, Middle East, Africa region, but has also held leadership roles within the Latin America, Caribbean, Asia-Pacific, and North America regions giving him a comprehensive global perspective from three continents. He has also held leadership positions in water parks, resorts, cruise lines, and as an industry supplier. As a founding member of MENALAC, Perry played a critical role in the growth of the industry within the region.

The board selected **Andreas Andersen**, CEO and president of **Liseberg Group** as treasurer. He will serve in that role 2025 to 2027. Andersen has two decades of experience in the attractions industry, as well as a master's degree in law and a postgraduate degree in accounting and business administration. His IAAPA involvement is far-reaching. He has served as chair of the IAAPA Global Board and chaired or volunteered



Perry



Andersen

as a member of multiple committees and task forces, including the EMEA regional advisory, governance, strategic planning, sustainability, rebranding and committee restructuring committees and task forces

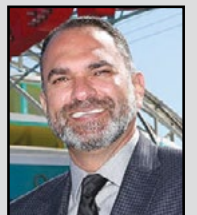
**Omid Aminifard**, chief operating officer and general manager of the historic **Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk**, has been elected to IAAPA's Board of Directors as a facility director, starting in 2025. Aminifard has a distinguished career in the attractions industry spanning more than 30 years. He has held leadership positions at **SeaWorld** in San Diego, multiple hotel and resort properties in Las Vegas, and at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk.

**Mohamed Abdalla Al Zaabi**, group CEO of **Miral**, has been elected facility director 2025 to 2027 on the IAAPA Global Board.

**Geoff Chutter** has been named manufacturer/supplier/consultant (MSC) director on the IAAPA Global Board for 2025 to 2027. Chutter is a long-standing supporter, sponsor and advocate for IAAPA and the global attractions industry. He has exhibited at and attended every IAAPA Expo since 1982, and every IAAPA Expo Europe and IAAPA Expo Asia since their respective inceptions.

**Rene Aziz**, CEO of **Grupo Divertido** based in Mexico, has been selected past chair director on the IAAPA Global Board, 2025 to 2027.

These new global board members will begin their terms on December 1, 2024.



Aminifard



# On-site accommodations address Holiday World staffing challenges

AT: Tim Baldwin  
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

SANTA CLAUS, Ind. — Staffing.

There is no denying that it is one of the industry's most challenging issues.

Employee housing has become one of the solutions parks have found. **Holiday World & Splashin' Safari** is one of the latest.

"After the pandemic, we started seeing our staffing levels struggle more and more, and it got progressively worse. It wasn't just us — it was everywhere. We had a problem finding people," said President and CEO **Matt Eckert**.

"For us, our guests pay a price at the gate expecting a full product. We were in a position where we were going to have to close down rides, water attractions or food locations. We didn't have enough people to staff [them]. While people understand that, it still wasn't acceptable to them."

Those are the types of decisions that confound parks, even when their very intentions are to open all attractions.

"When we were considering what to do next and deciding on the next thing to build, I took the position of 'I don't want to build another ride if we can't staff it.' We need to fix that problem first," Eckert said. "We quickly switched gears and built a dorm."



The first building is one of four "points" of Compass Commons. COURTESY HOLIDAY WORLD

first opened in 2023.

"Last year, we had 129 and it changed the landscape of the park," Eckert enthusiastically told *Amusement Today*. "First of all, we didn't have any rides closed. But the level of enthusiasm that these students brought to our park was beyond measure. Their work ethic was incredible."

Thousands of applicants work with **BridgeUSA**. Thirteen different countries were represented in Holiday World's first season with the program. However, it was a requirement to be an English speaker.

"They come here with the J1 visa program. Part of their goal is to get more exposed to the American culture," he said. "But I flipped it. I said, 'No. We

need to get more familiar with your culture. Teach us things. Last year I had a weekly Round Table with them with about 10 at a time. I wanted to get feedback. 'How's your experience going?/What could we do better?'"

The park learned that not all the residents wanted to eat American food all the time, so individuals can cook desired meals in kitchen areas. The park offers grocery runs on certain days. Each room has its own fridge, but the kitchens have larger refrigerators.

"We're all in. We're committed. But not only were we learning their culture, but they were learning each other's as well," Eckert noted. "That's very cool to me."

As the 2024 season start-

ed, they had 220 offers.

"2024 was even better than 2023," Eckert said. "We had several returning team members to the program, and many of them even recruited within their country for us because they thoroughly enjoyed the experience. The cultural exchange has been fantastic not only for the BridgeUSA students, but also for our American team members as well!"

Each room has two sets of bunk beds, making for four to a room. Each floor has a kitchen and lounging areas. There are laundry facilities.

"We have a person who is dedicated to overseeing that program," Eckert told AT. "They arrange cultural activities. They will go to St. Louis for a day, Nashville for a day or Louisville. We're in a rural area, so we're not like a bigger park. They don't have cars, so we have to work hard. We have busses where we have had to bus employees in, so we had those."

The floors are co-ed, but instead of gender-specific shower rooms, there are individual showers and bathrooms with locking doors. There is a huge sink prep area that all residents can use.

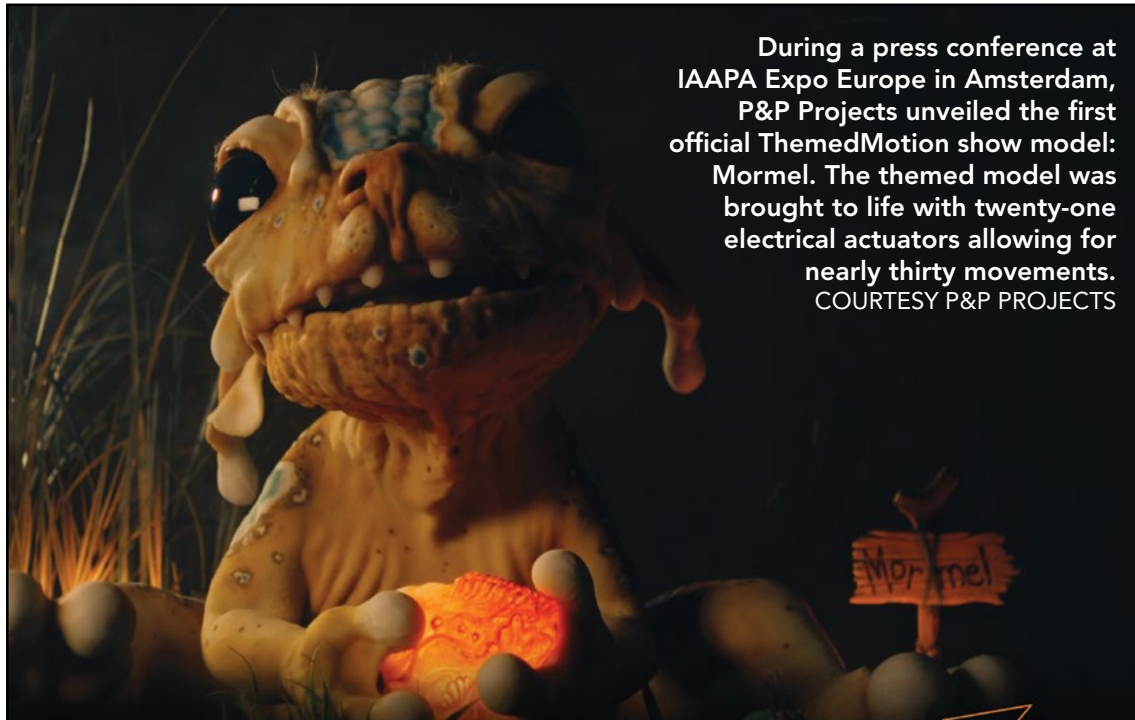
Residents are able to walk to the park as it is a very short distance.

"It has been truly game-changing for us."



Residents have common areas to socialize with each other (above left). Each bedroom sleeps four residents (above right). COURTESY HOLIDAY WORLD





During a press conference at IAAPA Expo Europe in Amsterdam, P&P Projects unveiled the first official ThemedMotion show model: Mormel. The themed model was brought to life with twenty-one electrical actuators allowing for nearly thirty movements. COURTESY P&P PROJECTS

## P&P Projects launches a new company with animatronic focus: ThemedMotion

SOMEREN, The Netherlands — **P&P Projects** has announced it is launching a brand-new branch — **ThemedMotion** — that will specialize in the turnkey development of animatronics and animated figures.

This year, P&P Projects is celebrating its 35th anniversary. Since 1989, the company has evolved into a renowned design-build partner for the global themed entertainment industry. As of today, P&P Projects has built a substantial résumé of experience for a wide range of clients and partners, from world-class theme parks and captivating museums to luxurious resorts and cruise lines.

Over the years, the company has provided the turnkey design and production of themed entertainment experiences, all centered around immersive theming and physical thematic elements.

Dynamic, moving show pieces play an important role in this. Despite having developed a multitude of these products in the past, it has been a long-held ambition of the company to develop animated, motion-based elements in the same turnkey fashion.



The launch of the new specialized ThemedMotion branch within the company that will focus on the design and production of animatronics and advanced animated figures follows a thorough exploration of commonly encountered issues and needs in this particular field of themed entertainment manufacturing.

With a clear aim in its development, ThemedMotion will cultivate durability, reliability and innovation as its core values. ThemedMotion sets itself apart with a clear focus on a custom control system that allows for remote monitoring of performance. This is combined with ease of maintenance and seamless integration with show sets thanks to P&P Projects' overarching expertise in this field.

During a special press conference at IAAPA Expo Europe in Amsterdam, P&P Projects unveiled the first official

ThemedMotion show model: Mormel. This model has been brought to life with twenty-one electrical actuators allowing for nearly thirty movements. It uses ThemedMotion's unique custom control software combined with a program developed by professional animators, resulting in a lifelike dynamic figure.

From theme park rides and visitor attractions to museum exhibits and resorts, P&P Projects specializes in the turnkey delivery of immersive experiences. The company's wide span of capabilities includes everything from storyline development, master planning and engineering to the production of show sets, show action equipment, as well as detailed animatronics and advanced animated figures. The P&P Projects team is known for delivering the highest quality in the ever-rising standard of the themed entertainment industry.

•pppprojects.com

## Gold Medal announces gourmet popcorn made with Butterfinger

CINCINNATI, Ohio — Get ready to crunch! **Gold Medal Products Co.** is excited to introduce Gourmet Popcorn made with Butterfinger, available for a special limited time. It's an irresistible combination of the crispety, crunchety, peanut-butter goodness of Butterfinger candy bars mixed with freshly popped popcorn. Available for preorder, this exclusive treat is set to deliver in November, just in time for the holiday season.

In partnership with **Ferrero North America**, the parent company of Butterfinger, Gold Medal has created this product with authentic Butterfinger ingredients.

This unique formula is more than just crushed candy bars, it delivers a complete flavor experience.

Advantages include:

- Unique flavor fusion: This exclusive recipe combines Butterfinger candy bar pieces with a rich peanut butter cream and freshly popped popcorn.
- Packaged for freshness: Each case includes four, two-pound mylar bags, gas-flushed for maximum freshness with a shelf life of six months.
- Retail ready: Serve fresh from a staging cabinet (no heat) or prepackage for shelf sales. Branded 46-ounce bags and display cabinet cling are included.
- Gourmet Popcorn made with Butterfinger is a delicious and memorable snack that will attract attention and drive sales for grocery stores and other retailers to concession stands at movie theaters or sports venues.

"Gourmet Popcorn made with Butterfinger merges two iconic treats together," stated Gold Medal President **Adam Browning**. "It's a snack that's not only delicious but also highly marketable. Businesses can benefit from this limited time offer by leveraging a well-established brand name that is sure to help boost holiday sales."

Gold Medal Products Co. has more than 500 employees committed to fueling its product lines with sales-generating concessions, as well as specialty foods, machines and supplies. In addition to the network of dealers worldwide, Gold Medal has 17 locations throughout the nation to serve its customers.

•gmpopcorn.com



COURTESY GOLD MEDAL



## OBITUARY

## John Collins, former IAAPA Chairman passes

OCEAN CITY, N.J. — John Collins, a former IAAPA Chairman and Hall of Fame member, has passed away. Collins was co-owner of Pleasure Park at Barry Island and was a key figure in expanding IAAPA's global presence. He was a third-generation member of a family that operated entertainment and attractions for more than 100 years and was honored as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.) in 2011 for his services to leisure and tourism.



Collins

Collins was an internationally respected icon and attractions industry leader with 30 years of experience. He started in the industry as a young man assisting his father. Following the purchase of a small amusement park in partnership with his brother, Collins used his talents to develop Barry Island Pleasure Park into one of Wales' leading visitor attractions.

During his extensive career in the amusement industry, Collins was a key development director behind the Tussauds U.K. parks, including the development of Chessington Zoo into a theme park, Alton Towers from its acquisition in 1990 and the first development of PortAventura.

Collins led rides and operations for the Tussauds park developments, including the breakthrough deal with B&M in the U.K. for Nemesis at Alton Towers. He was the person to bring John Wardley into the attractions industry when hiring him as a designer for Barry Island in Wales, U.K.. He was also later a non-executive director of Blackpool Pleasure Beach.

As the first IAAPA chairman from Wales, Collins traveled the world during 2003 representing the association and spreading its word.

## ON THE MOVE

**Indoor Active Brands** announced the appointment of **Sean Naughton** as chief financial officer (CFO) and the promotion of **Jessica McDonald** to vice president of marketing at **Altitude Trampoline Park**. These leadership changes reflect the company's commitment to strategic growth and development within the family entertainment industry.

Prior to joining Indoor Active Brands, Naughton served as vice president of strategy and financial planning analysis at **CEC Entertainment**. As CFO of Indoor Active Brands, Naughton will lead the company's financial strategy, focusing on protecting stakeholder investments while driving sustainable growth and expansion.



McDonald

"Working in the family entertainment industry has always been a rewarding experience, bringing joy to both kids and families," said Naughton. "At Indoor Active Brands, my focus is on driving growth for both Altitude Trampoline Park and The Pickle Pad. I'm excited to expand Altitude's footprint while helping The Pickle Pad achieve the same level of success."

Since joining the brand in October 2021, McDonald has played a crucial role in shaping its marketing strategy across various digital and traditional media platforms, including **TikTok**, **Reels**, and her leadership has driven key initiatives such as membership programs, birthday parties, gift card sales and product development, all of which have contributed to the brand's revenue growth.

"Jessica has been a vital part of our success at Altitude, and we wouldn't be where we are today without her contributions. It's always rewarding to promote from within, and we're thrilled to recognize Jessica's hard work with this well-deserved promotion," said **Mike Rotondo**, CEO of Indoor Active Brands. "As Altitude continues to grow and we ramp up efforts with The Pickle Pad, we're focused on building a leadership team that can support our vision. With Sean's financial expertise and Jessica's marketing acumen, we are well-positioned for success."

The **Themed Entertainment Association (TEA)** announced the appointment of its new chief executive officer, **Melissa Oviedo**. Oviedo officially stepped down from her previous position as TEA's international board president and assumed the CEO position as of October 1, 2024.

Oviedo has served in volunteer leadership within the TEA over the past 12 years. At a time when TEA's membership continues to grow internationally, expand within adjacent industries and position itself in a dynamic cross-section of trade groups and associations, Oviedo's strategic knowledge of the market, intimate knowledge of TEA's administration and forward-thinking approach to the capabilities of the TEA will allow for a transformative shift.

"As a long-standing member and financial supporter of the TEA, we wholeheartedly agree that Melissa is the best choice for the future of the association," said **Brian Morrow**, CEO and founder of **BMP**. "BMP supports the association as she transitions to the full-time CEO and appreciates the out-of-box thinking of the Executive Committee to help ease the impact on our business and clients during this transition."

The **Colorado Department of Agriculture** and the **Colorado State Fair** Board of Authority announced the selection of **Andrea Wiesenmeyer** as the fair's new general manager.

A unanimous choice by the interview committee, Wiesenmeyer steps into the leadership role left vacant by **Scott Stoller**, who stepped down after serving for six years, officials said.



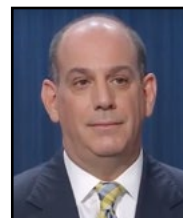
Wiesenmeyer

During his tenure, Stoller helped lead the State Fair through the COVID-19 pandemic, spearheaded the development of a 30-year master plan, and oversaw the continued growth of one of the Centennial State's keystone annual events.

Wiesenmeyer brings nearly a decade of experience in fair leadership, according to the news release. A graduate of the **Institute of Fair Management** and certified fair executive, she served as the marketing and partnership director for the **Clay County Fair** in Iowa for five years. She spent the past three years at the helm of the **Jerome County Fair and Rodeo** in Idaho.

**Elev8 Fun** has announced the addition of three new executives to spearhead what industry experts are calling an aggressive expansion plan. This strategic move comes as the company prepares for significant real estate acquisitions poised to fuel its growth trajectory.

**Andrew Cohen** has been appointed as the new president of Elev8 Fun, bringing with him a wealth of operational experience marked by strategic thinking, effective team management and a results-oriented approach. Cohen's proven track record in optimizing operations and driving efficiency spans both domestic and international organizations, with a notable background in real estate. His expertise will be pivotal as Elev8 Fun charts its course for expansive growth in the coming years.



Cohen

"I am honored to have been chosen as president of this growing company," stated Cohen. "With my team, I am confident we will scale this concept and improve upon its operational track record. I also hope to diversify Elev8's own product offering by conceptualizing entertainment venues that integrate other attractions, such as sports and activities, among others."

**Wow! Entertainment** announced the appointment of **Dewey Joe Beene Jr.** as vice president of development and production. With more than three decades of experience in the live entertainment and theme park industries, Beene will play a pivotal role in both shaping Wow!'s future creative projects and spearheading the company's expansion into providing full-scale production services for its clients. His addition is a key move as the company builds its reputation not just for delivering high-quality family entertainment but also for comprehensive production solutions that meet the evolving needs of the industry.



Beene

"With his expertise in both theme parks and live event productions, Dewey is an excellent addition to the Wow! team," commented Wow! Entertainment founder **Mark Brymer**. "As we expand our focus to include more production services work, Dewey's leadership and deep understanding of large-scale event logistics will enhance our ability to offer an even higher level of service to all our existing and future clients."

Beene's journey into the entertainment world began at the age of 15 when he took his first job as a magician's assistant at **Frontier City Theme Park** in his hometown of Oklahoma City. This early experience launched a career that saw him quickly rise through the ranks to become vice president of production by the age of 23 for an entertainment company that primarily serviced the theme park industry, mostly under the **Six Flags** brand. During his tenure, he oversaw productions across 36 theme parks nationwide, managed the development and implementation of over 200 live shows annually, and built a reputation as an industry innovator capable of launching large-scale productions on time and within budget.

"I've always been drawn to the magic of creating live experiences that connect with people, whether it's through a theatrical production, a theme park show or an immersive attraction," said Beene.

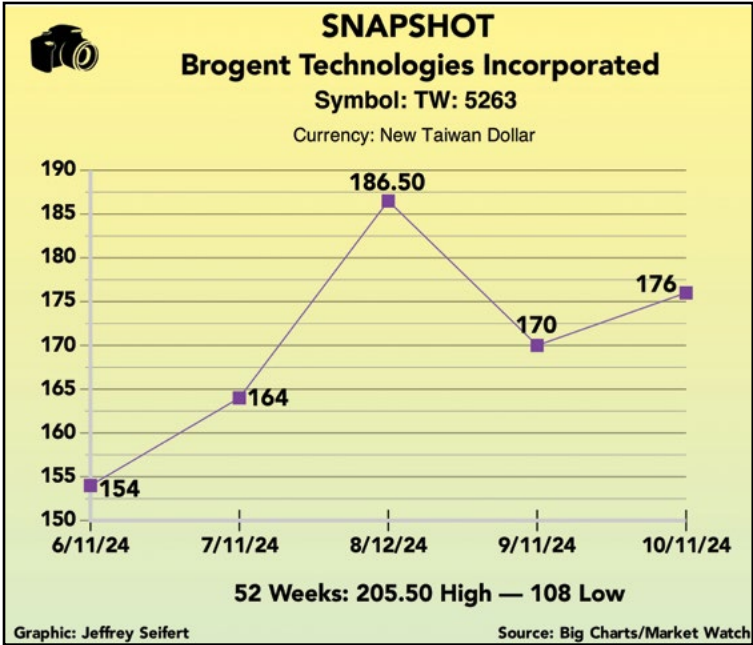


MARKET WATCH

| COMPANY  | SYMBOL   | MARKET | PRICE<br>10/15/24 | HIGH<br>52-Week | LOW<br>52-Week |
|--|----------|--------|-------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| PARKS AND ATTRACTIONS  |          |        |                   |                 |                |
| The Blackstone Group   | BX       | NYSE   | 156.32            | 161.25          | 88.59          |
| Bowlero Corp.  | BOWL     | NYSE   | 11.81             | 15.47           | 8.85           |
| Comcast Corp./NBCUniversal Media   | CMCSA    | NASDAQ | 42.11             | 47.11           | 36.43          |
| Dave & Busters Entertainment, LLC  | PLAY     | NASDAQ | 35.33             | 69.82           | 29.31          |
| EPR Properties   | EPR      | NYSE   | 48.99             | 50.26           | 39.65          |
| Falcon's Beyond  | FBYD     | NASDAQ | 9.92              | 44.00           | 7.02           |
| Fuji Kyoko Co., Ltd.   | JP:9010  | TYO    | 2628.00           | 4835.00         | 2417.00        |
| Haichang Holdings Ltd.   | HK:2255  | SEHK   | 0.84              | 1.08            | 0.65           |
| Leofoo Development Co.   | TW:2705  | TSEC   | 17.15             | 22.45           | 16.15          |
| MGM Resorts International  | MGM      | NYSE   | 39.39             | 48.25           | 33.44          |
| Parks America, Inc.  | PRKA     | OTC    | 0.46              | 0.61            | 0.23           |
| Royal Caribbean Cruises, Ltd.  | RCL      | NYSE   | 202.42            | 204.37          | 78.35          |
| Six Flags Entertainment Corp.  | FUN      | NYSE   | 39.19             | 58.70           | 34.04          |
| Tivoli A/S   | DK:TIV   | CSE    | 694.00            | 770.00          | 668.00         |
| United Parks & Resorts Inc.  | PRKS     | NYSE   | 50.88             | 60.36           | 40.87          |
| The Walt Disney Company  | DIS      | NYSE   | 94.22             | 123.74          | 79.23          |
| Warner Bros Discovery Inc.   | WBD      | NASDAQ | 7.60              | 12.70           | 6.64           |
| SUPPLIERS/OTHERS   |          |        |                   |                 |                |
| Brogent Technologies, Inc.   | TW:5263  | TSEC   | 184.00            | 205.50          | 108.00         |
| Sansei Technologies, Inc.  | TYO:6357 | TYO    | 1443.00           | 1852.00         | 1026.00        |
| Topgolf Callaway Brands  | MODG     | NYSE   | 10.43             | 16.89           | 9.05           |
| Details and information available at <a href="https://amusementtoday.com/stocks">amusementtoday.com/stocks</a> |          |        |                   |                 |                |

Worldwide Markets — CSE/DK: Copenhagen Stock Exchange; HK: The Stock Exchange of Hong Kong; JP: The Tokyo Stock Exchange; NASDAQ: National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quotations; NYSE: New York Stock Exchange; OCT: Over -the-counter stocks; TAIEX: The Taiwan Capitalization Weighted Stock Index; TYO: The Tokyo Stock Exchange; TW: The Taiwan Stock Exchange.

—SOURCES: Bigcharts.com



| DIESEL PRICES         |                         |                        |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Region (U.S)          | As of 10/14/24          | Change from 1 year ago |
| East Coast            | \$3.586                 | (\$0.818)              |
| Midwest               | \$3.651                 | (\$0.653)              |
| Gulf Coast            | \$3.337                 | (\$0.777)              |
| Mountain              | \$3.635                 | (\$1.029)              |
| West Coast            | \$3.874                 | (\$1.136)              |
| California            | \$4.734                 | (\$1.385)              |
| CURRENCY              |                         |                        |
| On 10/16/24 \$1 USD = |                         |                        |
| 0.9175                | EURO                    |                        |
| 0.7650                | GBP (British Pound)     |                        |
| 149.32                | JPY (Japanese Yen)      |                        |
| 0.8621                | CHF (Swiss Franc)       |                        |
| 1.4899                | AUD (Australian Dollar) |                        |
| 1.3800                | CAD (Canadian Dollar)   |                        |

BUSINESS WATCH

Palace Entertainment expands partnership

PITTSBURGH, Pa. — **Fred Rogers Productions**, producer of *Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood* and other hit **PBS Kids** series, and **Palace Entertainment** announced a new multi-year licensing deal across six Palace Entertainment parks throughout the United States. This new licensing deal will allow both organizations to bring programming from extremely popular family-friendly properties including *Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood*, *Alma’s Way*, *Donkey Hodie* and *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* to family-oriented Palace Entertainment amusement parks throughout the country.

“Our new relationship with Palace Entertainment will bring our characters and brands to families across the country,” said **Christopher Arnold**, Fred Rogers Productions’ chief operating officer. “The experiences we create together will foster moments of joy and connection for all families.”

For the first time ever, Daniel Tiger and his friends will make appearances at **Dutch Wonderland** in Lancaster, Pennsylvania; **Adventureland Resort** in Altoona, Iowa; and **Castle Park** in Riverside, California. Daniel and friends from the Neighborhood of Make-Believe will also expand the entertainment offerings at **Lake Compounce** in Bristol, Connecticut; **Idlewild & SoakZone** outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and **Story Land** in Glen, New Hampshire.

The theme park operator plans to expand its multi-year, multi-park partnership with more news to be announced, as the parks continue to build on these character experiences with more interactive experiences for guests to enjoy.

GoPhoto, Ripley unite for new business entity

ORLANDO — **GoPhoto** announced the opening of its new U.S. office in partnership with **Ripley Entertainment**. This collaboration marks a significant milestone for both companies, demonstrating their shared commitment to transforming the leisure and themed entertainment industry.

The new U.S. entity, jointly owned by GoPhoto and Ripley Entertainment, will be headquartered in Orlando, Florida. The partnership unites GoPhoto’s state-of-the-art photo retail technology with Ripley Entertainment’s global reputation for delivering unforgettable experiences to audiences of all ages.

“We are thrilled to join forces with Ripley’s to bring the next evolution in photo retail to the leisure and themed entertainment industry,” stated **Daniel Duivestain**, founder and CEO of GoPhoto. “This collaboration reflects our shared vision of enhancing guest experiences through cutting-edge technology.”

Wavetek unveils new logo and brand

COHOES, N.Y. — **WaveTek** unveiled a new logo to reflect its commitment to innovation, creativity, performance and excitement in wave-based experiences.

“WaveTek has always been synonymous with cutting-edge technology, solutions-based engineering and superior wave performance. Our new logo reflects that heritage while also showcasing our forward-thinking vision,” said **Bruce Quay**, CEO at WaveTek. “It’s not just about waves; it’s about movement, excitement and creating the most fun and immersive experiences possible.”

As part of **Aquatic Development Group**, WaveTek’s logo marks a new chapter for WaveTek as the company continues to explore new advancements in wave technology while maintaining the high standards that have defined the brand for decades.



# Women INFLUENCE

## A view from the top...

After a career in hospitality and event services, **Trisha Sissons** sought something different and found the answer in the attractions industry. Today she brings her formula of positivity, authenticity and focus on fun daily to **Island H2O Water Park**.

## Positivity is a guide for Sissons

KISSIMMEE, Fla. — Like many American children, Trisha Sissons made annual trips to Orlando to visit Walt Disney World and SeaWorld Orlando. When her family moved to Central Florida, she lived in the heart of the attractions industry, surrounded by destination parks and day-trip attractions. When she went to college at the University of Central Florida, the lure of the industry didn't — yet — pull her in.

"I earned my degree in Marketing and Communications," Sissons shared. "While in school, I worked as a bartender and learned a great deal about hospitality, guest services and operations. I also accepted an internship with a hospitality company and was happily hired full-time after graduation."

Sissons' role focused on creating corporate events of all sizes. "I did it all," Sissons said. "From writing proposals to installing event lighting to moving décor and foliage in ballrooms, it was exciting and a unique industry to be a part of."

Like many people, after the COVID pandemic in 2020, Sissons found herself wanting something different that could blend her skills with the opportunity to learn and grow. "I started to explore opportunities around Orlando and stumbled upon a position for a group sales coordinator with Island H2O Waterpark."

"As much as I loved what I was doing, I found myself drawn to the role because it offered more flexibility with my schedule and felt like the next step to take after producing for groups. I saw it as the chance to sell groups a destination. And it sounded fun." She has not looked back since. Since joining the park, which is part of the Premier Parks family, Sissons has been promoted internally several times, and now serves in her current role as sales and marketing manager.

"My role, our park and this industry focus on making family memories," Sissons explained. "The rewards come from providing a great experience for our guests. We work hard, but we do it for others in a supportive environment."

"While I came to Island H2O I had many strong relationships with professionals who work in Orlando's hospitality industry, but becoming part of the attractions industry opened my eyes to an entirely new culture."

"Everyone is incredibly supportive," she continued. "That's true both internally with my colleagues at Island H2O and Premier Parks, as well as other parks and attractions. You can pick up the phone and ask for advice or a suggestion, and people will take the time to help you. The support system within this industry is a special one and unlike any other."

Along with the people, Sissons says the ability to be creative at a water park like Island H2O is special and enviable.

"We are surrounded by destination theme parks," she said. "We are not competing with them, but we do have more than 50,000 annual pass holders who we want to come back to us again and again to make memories together," she said. "We know who we are, and we always focus on creating fun."

To do that, Sissons and her team develop unique events that often lean into popular news and trends. Pop icon Taylor Swift's three-night concert event in Miami, Florida, led them to bring the "Swiftie" experience closer to home.

"We knew how hard it was to get tickets to Taylor's concerts, as well as how expensive they were. We wanted to celebrate Taylor's fans and make a bit of her experience accessible to our guests. The

## Trisha Sissons

**H2O Water Park**  
**Kissimmee, Florida**



Eras Splash Bash event became our answer. We created a family-friendly foam party in our Live! Lagoon Wave Pool, which included Taylor Trivia, deejaying her most popular hits, a shimmery costume contest and even a friendship bracelet-making station. We wanted our season pass holders and locals alike to be part of the Taylor phenomenon while having fun at Island H2O."

As Sissons has grown in her career, she has remained focused on bringing positivity to the park's guests and her staff.

"People — families — choose to spend their money with us," Sissons explained. "Every day we must provide a safe experience and one that is positive and fun. There is nothing worse than engaging in negativity. I remind our team members that our guests can see and feel such energy. They can read authenticity, and it is up to us to be light and positive."

Sissons leans into that positivity when offering advice to others. Whether starting a job with a new company, seeking a promotion or applying for an entirely new role, the first step is to be positive. The

second, she said, "Is to show up. Take the time to volunteer and learn. Managers and leaders respond to those who ask, 'Can I help? What can I do?' as well as employees who show up. It is important to make an appointment to learn," she furthered. "If you don't invest in yourself, no one else will. I started in group sales. I learned from my colleagues, I volunteered for events, and I asked questions of my leaders. I invested in my growth by showing I'm invested in our park. I share my story with others and remind them if you show up and are positive, you are halfway there."

Sissons also recognizes that those first steps can seem daunting.

"Fear does hold us back," she shared. "It's important to remember that most people want to help. Particularly in this industry. You just need to take a breath and then ask the question. Whether it is for immediate advice, getting the opportunity to shadow a role or even trying something altogether new, don't let fear prevent your opportunity to grow."

—Susan Storey





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# Golden Ticket Awards filled with surprises, beneficial networking

AT: Tim Baldwin

tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

WEST MIFFLIN, Pa. — *Amusement Today's* Golden Ticket Awards set records for attendance this past September. Both the golf tournament (see page 66) and the networking event saw their highest numbers yet. Just under 350 were in attendance at host park **Kennywood**.

Excitement was high as industry professionals had opportunities to meet, discuss the current season and gather insightful perspectives. Praise for both the host park and *Amusement Today* was very high.

## Sandcastle

### Friday Evening Social

Following check-in at the **Westin Pittsburgh**, where attendees picked up credentials and a swag bag filled with regional items and event souvenirs, the majority of attendees boarded buses to navigate the crooked streets and numerous bridges of The Steel City. Grouped on buses, professionals were able to reconnect with old friends and make new ones instead of contending with the snarl of rush hour.

The forecast was not favorable, and attendees hoped for at least an hour of beneficial networking time and opportunities to see the park before rain could cause people to take shelter. Although dark skies were on the horizon (and even a bit of lightning), not a drop fell until the opening reception was complete.

**Sandcastle** rolled out the welcome with several delicious food stations and open bars. **RWS** provided enter-



Firefly Drone Shows capped off the event with a customized production in the sky (above left). A spokesperson from Evolv addressed the group during the safety and security tour (above right). Winners of Golden Tickets showed their awards in a group photo on stage (below). COURTESY FIREFLY; AT/TIM BALDWIN, JOHN W.C. ROBINSON



tainment, and the weather was pleasant and comfortable. A political campaign had a presidential candidate in town, which meant the cancellation of the planned drone show to kick off the event (which was moved to the following evening). The air space became off-limits.

Fun photo ops were available with the park décor, the rolling surf of the wave pool, and park mascots.

For an opening night, it was a hugely successful launch to the event as attendees were able to get to know each other better, which is one of the main goals of the Golden Ticket Awards event. A large number of industry friends continued the festivities once back at the hotel, all but overtaking the Westin's bar.

## Behind the scenes

Saturday, September 7, numerous people arrived in time for special behind-the-scenes tours offered by Kennywood, prior to opening time. A history tour was



the most popular with Andy Quinn, park historian and community relations manager for Kennywood, offering one of the talks. A wooden coaster maintenance tour offered a close-up look at the care of the park's three renowned woodies. A safety tour had representatives from **Evolv**, **3DK9** and **Motorola Solutions** share best practices in keeping guests safe — all in operation at Kennywood.

It was an excellent opportunity for those on the tour to ask questions about what piqued their interests.

Once the park was open, all attendees enjoyed the charm

and character of Kennywood, whether they chose to take advantage of the Speedy Pass program to enjoy several rides or photograph the historic park in a leisurely stroll.

A late afternoon cocktail hour had everyone reconvene again for social opportunities. With plentiful appetizers available, it was a surprise that attendees would be able to enjoy dinner.

However, that wasn't a problem. *Amusement Today* received numerous comments on the outstanding job the catering team at Kennywood pulled off for the Golden Ticket Awards. The park

doesn't own an indoor facility large enough to hold everyone in attendance (particularly during operating hours), nor does it have a theater venue. The solution to those realities was the transformation of the park's biggest picnic venue into a festive dining area, complete with a stage.

## Golden Tickets came with surprises

It was clear that it was the longest awards ceremony in Golden Ticket history, but most of that owed to the additional awards given during the 2024 edition, as well as the heartfelt speeches that accompanied them.

In addition to the core categories that are determined by hundreds of voters, the accolades also contained Publisher's Picks and Legend awards, several of which took winners by surprise — more than any in GTA history.

The first came as **Europa-Park**, in attendance for accepting for top category Best Park and Best New Roller Coaster, received a surprise Publisher's Pick for the Turnstile Award.



Attendees arrived at Sandcastle Waterpark for the Friday evening social (above left). RWS provided entertainment throughout the event (above right). COURTESY RON GUSTAFSON, RICHARD MUNCH





Michael Mack accepted the Turnstile Award for Europa-Park, the first surprise of the evening.  
AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON

## ►GOLDEN Continued from page 64

Recognizing efforts that a park goes to in order to keep visitors returning to enjoy what they've loved, this year's Turnstile Award acknowledged Germany's largest theme park for its feat of bringing back an area of the park that had been severely damaged by a fire.

"To win a prize like this means you also had to have a tragedy," Michael Mack said in his surprise acceptance. "As much as I am happy to receive this, I hope we don't win again," he joked.

This award was followed by a second surprise. **Beth Root** was honored as Person of the Year for her efforts in saving lives through the World's Largest Swimming Lesson, now having completed its 15th year and has experienced exponential growth.

"I had no idea. This is quite an honor, but the real thanks and appreciation needs to go to our host facilities," Root humbly said. "The host locations can take the message to their local community — and that's the goal. And, hopefully, try to continue to keep parents from having to face a horrible situation."

The designation of Legends brought even more surprises, starting with the

biggest of the evening. AT Publisher **Gary Slade**, unbeknownst that his own staff and industry friends had secretly collaborated to recognize him as a Golden Ticket Legend, received the first one before he could even take the stage. Once he did, it was to a standing ovation.

A later Legend recognition showcased the three founders of **American Coaster Enthusiasts**. **Richard Munch**, **Roy Brashears** and **Paula Greenwald** (wife of the late **Paul Greenwald**) gave remarks surrounding how the enthusiast community has always supported the industry in various ways, including research, media and donations.

The final Legend was **Palace Entertainment's John Reilly**, who gave a humble acceptance to close out the night. "It's an honor to work with these parks every day," he said. "I've learned a lot from the Palace team about honoring the legacy we have."

One more surprise happened mid-ceremony when **AIMS International**, following honoring **Patty Beazley** as its 2024 Safety Award winner, honored a second recipient. **Premier Rides' Jim Seay** was dumbfounded to hear he had been given the Lifetime Contribution Award. "I didn't get a phone call," he humorously said in his surprise,

## GTA Ambassadors spotlight youth



GTA Ambassadors from left to right are Na-Tiyea Turner, Andrew McLaughlin, Noah Madden and Robert Konesky. AT/DAN FEICHT

WEST MIFFLIN, Pa. — Each year, *Amusement Today* approaches the host facility to select young professionals who demonstrate the professionalism and enthusiasm of the amusement industry. These individuals assist with the Golden Ticket Awards ceremony. The class of 2024 included three team members from **Kennywood** and one from **Sandcastle**.

**Bobby Konesky** attends **Community College of Allegheny County**, with a major in business management. He has worked in the industry for four seasons. His favorite thing about working at Sandcastle: "The people you meet and connections you make."

**Andrew McLaughlin** attends the **University of Pittsburgh** with a major in history and is part of a bluegrass ensemble at Pitt. He has worked three seasons at Kennywood. His favorite thing about work: "Being part of the history and operating the older rides."

**Noah Madden** attends **Duquesne** with an undergrad major in psychology (2024) and has begun his studies for his master's in English literature. He has worked seven seasons at Kennywood. His favorite thing about being on the job: "Meeting so many different people from many different backgrounds, as well as the experiences you get while doing the job."

**Na-Tiyea Turner** attends **PennWest Clarion** with a major in psychology.

After working five seasons at Kennywood, her favorite thing: "The people! They are friendly and they just make it an enjoyable environment to work in."

making a callback to a previous comment from Beazley.

### Finale

While long, once the ceremony was concluded, the night continued its celebration with photos and congratulations.

Kennywood put on a closing party with several rides open, a DJ and still more food and drink.

The drone show by **Firefly** that had been postponed from the night before took place

in the skies over Kennywood, which was far enough away from downtown Pittsburgh to avoid any restrictions. Lighted aerial displays tailored to the Golden Ticket Awards were met with cheers.

Attendees praised the hosts, as well as *Amusement Today*, for one of the finest Golden Ticket Awards to date.

"I had a lot of fun and I think everyone else did as well!" smiled Kennywood General Manager **Ricky Spicuzza**. "The response we

received from industry peers and friends was overwhelming and greatly amplified the hard work that the entire teams from Kennywood and Sandcastle put into making the Golden Ticket Awards so special. The theme park industry is vast and bustling, yet it feels like such a close-knit community where professionals can network and share best practices. It was an honor to be a part of this event and to showcase our great parks here in Pittsburgh."



Attendees enjoyed the classic attractions that Kennywood has to offer (above left). AT Publisher Gary Slade was caught off guard by his own staff and industry friends. He struck a pose he remembered from the late Will Koch (above middle). Cocktail hour allowed visitors to mingle (above right).

AT/TIM BALDWIN, JOHN W.C. ROBINSON





# Golf stars of amusement industry support Roller Coaster Museum

WEST MIFFLIN, Pa. — Fifty golfers hit the links at this year's Golden Ticket Awards to raise money for the **National Roller Coaster Museum (NRCMA)**. The tournament was held at the Westwood Golf Course in West Mifflin, Pennsylvania, and proved to be a very competitive match with three teams finishing in a tie at 10 under par. A PGA card match awarded the final prize to the team from **PPG Paints**.

The winners include:

**Tournament winners**

- Tom Kerr, Callie Gowarty, Keith Geisler and Tracy Wilson

**Longest Drive winner**

- Ryan Felty, Great Coasters International (Nearly had a hole-in-one at the start of the round, too!)

**Closest to the Pin**

- Jason Prather, Baynum Amusement Solutions

"We want to thank all the companies who stepped up to sponsor the golf tournament," **Jeff Novotny**, NRCMA chairman. "Without them, the event would not have been possible." The event raised \$5,000 for the NRCMA.

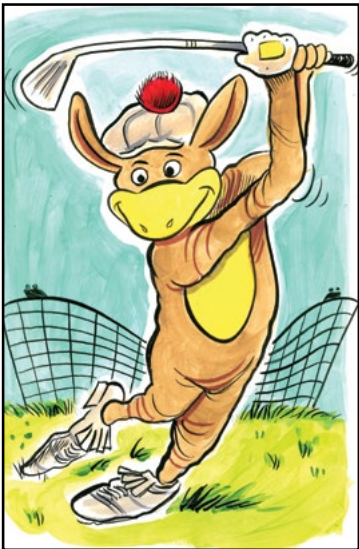
At the event, the Longest Drive contest was sponsored by **Haas & Wilkerson Insurance**, the Closest to the Pin contest was sponsored by **Tatvam** powered by **Netserv**, lunch was sponsored by **Six Flags Entertainment** and the event's beverage cart was sponsored by *Amusement Today*.

The tournament's golf balls were provided by the National Roller Coaster Museum and **Knoebels Amusement Resort**, golf towels were provided by **Chance Rides** and the grand prizes came courtesy of Knoebels Amusement Resort, the National Roller Coaster Museum, **Rocky Mountain Coasters/Larson**, **Dollywood** and **Kennywood Park**.

In addition to the acquisition of the new artifacts, the NRCMA continues to execute its mission of preserving and protecting the history of the amusement industry. While construction continues at the museum's main facility in Plainview, Texas, it is still reliant solely on the generosity of industry suppliers, fans and facilities. Donations can be made online at [rollercoastermuseum.org](http://rollercoastermuseum.org) or by mailing the NRCMA at P.O. Box 5424, Arlington Texas 76005.



Ryan Felty of Great Coasters International had a near hole-in-one and won the Longest Drive contest. COURTESY RON GUSTAFSON



*Amusement Today* created a unique piece of promotional art featuring Kennywood's Kenny Kangaroo just for the golf event. AT/BUBBA FLINT



Chris Baynum sets up for a long drive to start off the day at the NRCMA Golf Tournament. AT/GARY SLADE



The team of (l to r) Alberto Jarquin, Kenny, Jim Naret and Kevin Nadalin take a moment to pose for the birdie. AT/GARY SLADE



The team from PPG Paints — (l to r) Tom Kerr, Tracy Wilson, Kenny, Callie Gowarty and Keith Geisler — took home the tournament victory. AT/GARY SLADE



Pete Barto, Brian Knoebel, Kenny, Melissa Bamford and Bradford Doolittle had a great day on the greens. AT/GARY SLADE



Fun Spot team members — (l to r) Stephen Burgess, John Arie, Jr., Tracy Arie and Andre Corbin — weren't putting around. AT/GARY SLADE



The day was all smiles for the team of (l to r) Seth Alberts, Kenny, Mikayla Arnold, Roger Berry and Andy Vogelsong. AT/GARY SLADE





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Herschend Family Entertainment staff gathered for a group photo with all their company's 2024 awards. AT/DAN FEICHT

"Just a quick note to say thank you for this year's Golden Ticket awards event. I know firsthand how much work goes into these things, and you really delivered such a great program and experience. IAAPA is 106 years old this year and Kennywood is a 103-year member, so it was nice to be at such an iconic and historic member park."

— Michael Shelton, IAAPA

"The entire team at *Amusement Today* once again produced an incredible event. To begin the event like a pep rally and end with heartfelt speeches covered every emotion we incur in this amazing industry. WELL DONE to everyone involved!"

— Brian Knoebel, Knoebels Amusement Resort



To accept Best Park, Michael Mack (left) brought up his wife Miriam and his two sons, all of whom traveled from Germany. AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON



Seen at dinner were (l to r) Palace Entertainment's John Reilly (one of the evening's Legend recipients), industry icon Dennis Spiegel (International Theme Park Services) and Kennywood General Manager Ricky Spicuzza. COURTESY RICHARD MUNCH



Patty Sullivan (Eli Bridge) poses with Kenny Kangaroo at the Friday social at Sandcastle. AT/TIM BALDWIN



Kennywood's Kangaroo ride was available during the after-hours party. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

"I wanted to congratulate *Amusement Today* on a fantastic Golden Tickets Award program at Kennywood! The attendance was admirable, and the programs were well-done. To think that you provide all that fun, entertainment, food, and drink for no charge is truly mind-blowing! Great job, it was fun to see a lot of old friends and new ones as well."

— Dennis L. Spiegel, International Theme Park Services, Inc.



Premier Rides' Jim Seay (second from left) was surprised by the AIMS Lifetime Contribution Award. He is seen here with Pat Hoffman of AIMS, Patty Beazley, the recipient of the 2024 Safety Award, and Amy Lowenstein from AIMS. AT/DAN FEICHT

"...Once again, congratulations to the AT team on a job well done with this weekend's event and ceremony. It was evident that thousands of hours went into making this event happen!"

— Dalton Fischer, Silver Dollar City

"It had been some time since I've been able to attend the awards. I am thrilled to see how much it has grown. The *Amusement Today* team have done an excellent job in orchestrating the event, incorporating the necessary elements such as entertainment and sponsors, and adding special touches."

— Sharon Parker, Gateway Ticketing

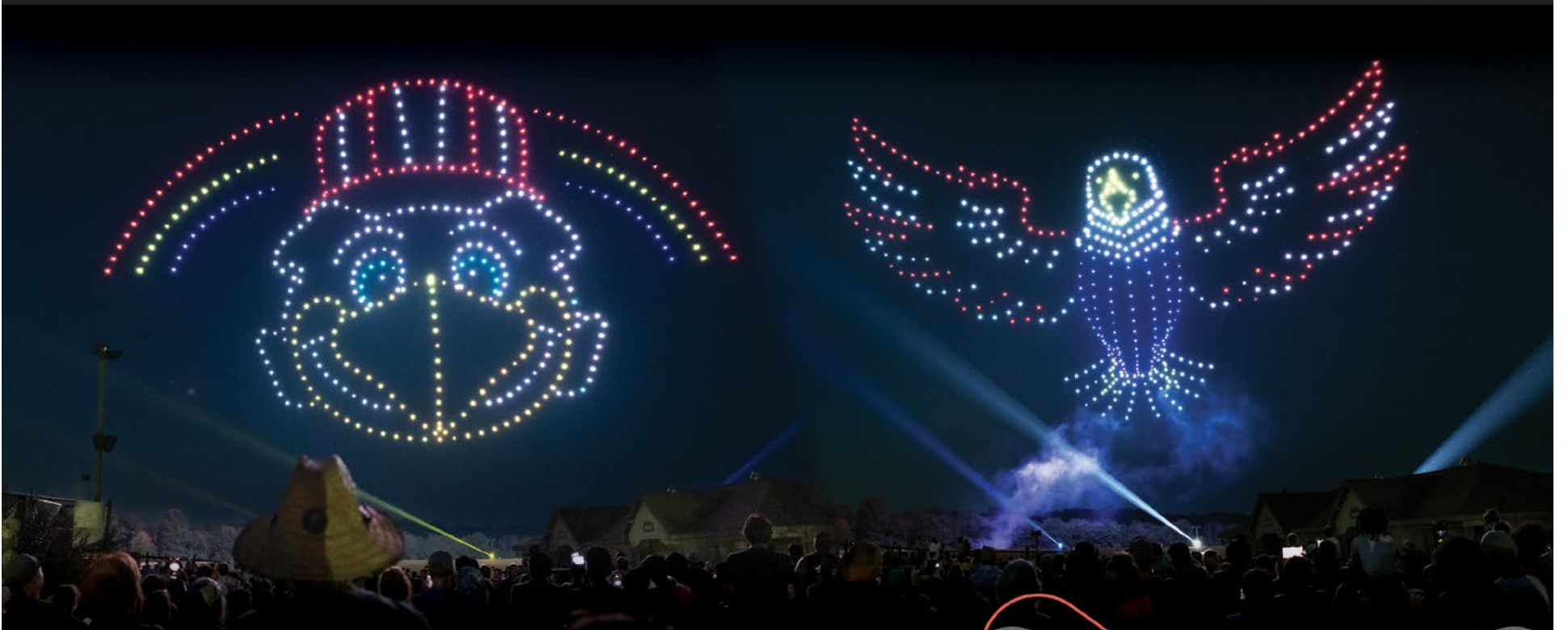


While rain was forecasted, the networking kickoff at Sandcastle Waterpark escaped any precipitation. AT/TIM BALDWIN





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Thank you, *Amusement Today*, for recognizing the founders of the American Coaster Enthusiasts as recipients of the Golden Ticket Legends award. To be even considered for such an award is deeply humbling. There is a long history of individuals who have made a difference in the amusement industry, and it is a sincere honor to be mentioned in the same breath as all of these legends that came before.

Being totally unaware that this was in the works, I was shocked to receive this honor in front of the industry. I may have been even more surprised to see Roy Brashears and Paula Greenwald after so many decades. After all, 47 years ago, Roy, Paul Greenwald and I were three strangers who met in Virginia for a publicity stunt at Kings Dominion. I was a college student residing in New York City, Roy worked at the Pentagon, and Paul was a teacher and part-time tour guide at Niagara Falls. Based on preliminary research (the internet was still a dream), I had discovered there were less than 90 wood roller coasters operating in North America. Could the three of us realistically come together to form a club interested in both promoting and preserving the roller coaster? Could we make a difference? It would take a year to find out — and even if we couldn't pull it off, we were going to have fun trying.

In the spring of 1978, we put together a program for a summer meeting, calling it a Coaster Con, with the help of Busch Gardens, The Old Country, in Williamsburg. We worked with Robert Cartmell, Gary Kyriazi, Lee Bush and John Caruthers, all recognized for their expertise and interest in the project. This was before email, and the only communication available was by telephone and U.S. mail. We were back in Virginia a year later, and the two-day event went off without a hitch, proving there was curiosity, even if only 50 souls attended the first convention. And it would take off from there, mainly by word of mouth, newspaper articles and television spots. In reality, the growth, longevity and success of ACE was, and still is, about people who love and enjoy riding roller coasters. Of course, there were growing pains, but enough people believed in the club that it remains healthy approaching half a century of fun.

It is important to remember that throughout those years, American Coaster Enthusiasts would not exist without respected leadership, a robust volunteer base, and all the researchers, writers, photographers, and park and manufacturing partners. It is those volunteers, numbering in the thousands, who kept the nonprofit organization healthy and vibrant, evolving into what is today the oldest and largest park enthusiast group in the world.

As for Roy, Paul and I, it may all come down to being in the right place at the right time. I feel blessed to have ACE in my life and take pride in the excellent publications, the events, the camaraderie and the countless friends that I've made over the years. If we can take credit for anything, my hope is that we saved the wood coaster in some way, by bringing attention to its predicament a half-century ago, adding a sense of urgency for the ride's future. With over 5,000 roller coasters now operating worldwide, I think we accomplished what we set out to do. Let's keep it rolling!

— **Richard Munch,**  
**American Coaster Enthusiasts**



Eugene Naughton and Jim Timon accept Legend acknowledgements of their park's retired categories: Dollywood's Smoky Mountain Christmas and Universal Florida's Halloween Horror Nights. AT/DAN FEICHT



Attendees were greeted with a colorful goodbye at the exit. AT/DAVID FAKE



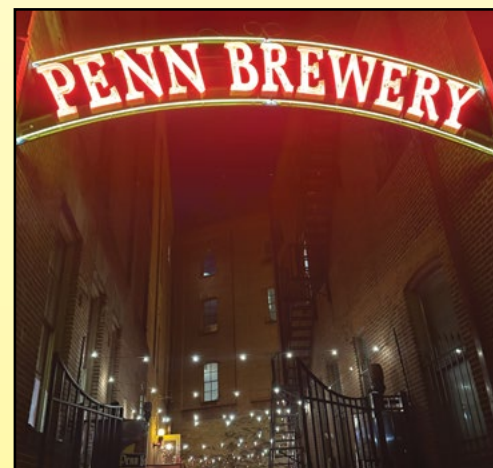
From left to right are Richard Munch, Roy Brashears and Paula Greenwald, who accepted Legend awards for the founding of American Coaster Enthusiasts. Greenwald accepted on behalf of her late husband Paul. Munch was caught by surprise by the award. AT/DAN FEICHT

"Thanks for organizing such an incredible event, again! Everything was impeccable. It is remarkable how you think of every single detail."

— **Ricardo Tonding-Etges, Vekoma**

"Great job to you and your team — the Golden Ticket event was so much fun! I really enjoyed being a part of the event — thank you again."

— **Sara Seay, Premier Rides**



Following Thursday meetings, board members of the NRCMA and AIMS met for a private event at Penn Brewery. AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON



Kennywood transformed its largest picnic pavilion into a festive setting for the 2024 awards ceremony. Mother Nature graciously cooperated. AT/TIM BALDWIN



Beth Root (left), to her surprise, received Person of the Year. AT/DAN FEICHT

"I just wanted to send a heartfelt thank you for putting on the GTAs again and all the effort your team throws into it. We all loved the food, too, one of the best GTA dinners ever! The "IOE table" had so, so much fun and made a lot of great memories. I'm just very thankful for the experience."

— **Anne Irvine, Irvine Ondrey Engineering**



**GOLDEN TICKET AWARDS**

Presenters gathered for a group photo following the ceremony.  
AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON

"Thank yinz for a great weekend. From our side, we felt this was the best GTAs in quite a while when it came to the quality and quantity of clients."

— **Adam Sandy, Zamperla**

Park President Richard Pretlow accepts the 2024 Leadership Award for Morgan's Wonderland.  
AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON



"Just letting you know how much I truly appreciate being chosen as a "Legend" for co-founding American Coaster Enthusiasts with a Golden Ticket Award. Considering that Richard was kept in the dark, his surprised reaction was as expected. The event was one of the most professionally produced I have ever attended. Thanks for everything."

— **Roy Brashears, American Coaster Enthusiasts**



Dick Knoebel (seated) accepts the award for Best Wooden Coaster, along with his sons Brian and Rick. The award was presented by Richard Munch (NRCMA) and Hunter Novotny (Larson/RMC) left. AT/DAVID FAKE

"Vacations during my childhood were quite different growing up with my father. They often revolved around coaster conventions and visits to amusement parks. My sisters [Kim and Lauren] and I learned to love roller coasters, each of us embracing that passion to slightly varying degrees. I'm still amazed at how our mom managed to keep up with it all! My dad's enthusiasm for visiting parks was always matched by his excitement to reconnect with friends, both old and new — ACE members, industry professionals, and more. His talent for fostering genuine connections has played a pivotal role in shaping ACE into what it is today. He is truly deserving of this Golden Ticket Legend Award after years of dedication and countless hours spent in pursuit of his passion. I truly believe he has realized the first part of his dream by establishing the National Roller Coaster Museum and Archives. Once the museum opens, I am confident he will have fulfilled his vision of preserving and showcasing an incredible collection of amusement park history in one central location."

— **Jennifer Schuur, daughter of Richard Munch, ACE co-founder**



Following the ceremony, Kennywood held an after-hours party with more snacks, cocktails and a selection of rides open for attendees.  
AT/TIM BALDWIN



— **Steve Gorman, Waldameer Park**

Lane Nelson (center) accepts the Legend Award for her late husband, Paul Nelson, flanked by their daughter and son-in-law Nancy and Steve Gorman.  
AT/DAN FEICHT

Kennywood and AT staff accept the delivery of Golden Ticket swag via Kennywood trolley.  
AT/SAMMY PICCOLA



"What a wonderful experience the Golden Ticket Awards event was. Throughout the weekend, I kept noticing how comfortable everyone was. While they were working, it was a well-balanced execution of fun and professionalism appropriate for the industry. I am grateful to have been able to experience it. You and your team have certainly built a wonderful event."

— **Elizabeth Ringas, American Coaster Enthusiasts**



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# SAFETY, MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

► EpicSurf wins award for accessibility collaboration — page 76 / AIMS celebrates 60 years — page 82

## 3DK9 Detection Services supplies additional layer of security, safety

AT: Tim Baldwin

tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

MIAMI, Fla. — Security is an elevated procedure that has become a way of life in the 21st century. Theme parks, as well as concert and sports venues, have upped their game. **3DK9 Detection Services** has been in business for close to nine years. In addition to the amusement industry, its customers include major sports teams, schools, treatment centers, live events and festivals.

“We have different kinds of canines that we’ll deploy,” said **Frank Cilurso**, CEO. “One is a traditional explosives canine. They can search bags or cars for any dangerous materials. Weapons canines are mobile. They can be in a crowd of individuals who could have a weapon. They are able to do it without notifying the person holding the weapon. Security or police can be informed and quickly respond to the potential threat. We also have narcotics canines. What a lot of parks find is that these canines have improved their clients’ experience. They deal with families who are upset because weed is smoked in the park or there is drug use.”

The mission is to create a safe environment for all of a venue’s visitors, as well as the staff.

Some theme parks



Canines are trained to detect weapons, narcotics and explosives. Canine patrols are trained to handle large crowds (below left). Because canines are always moving, they can be at entrances, midways or anywhere within the venue (below right). COURTESY 3DK9



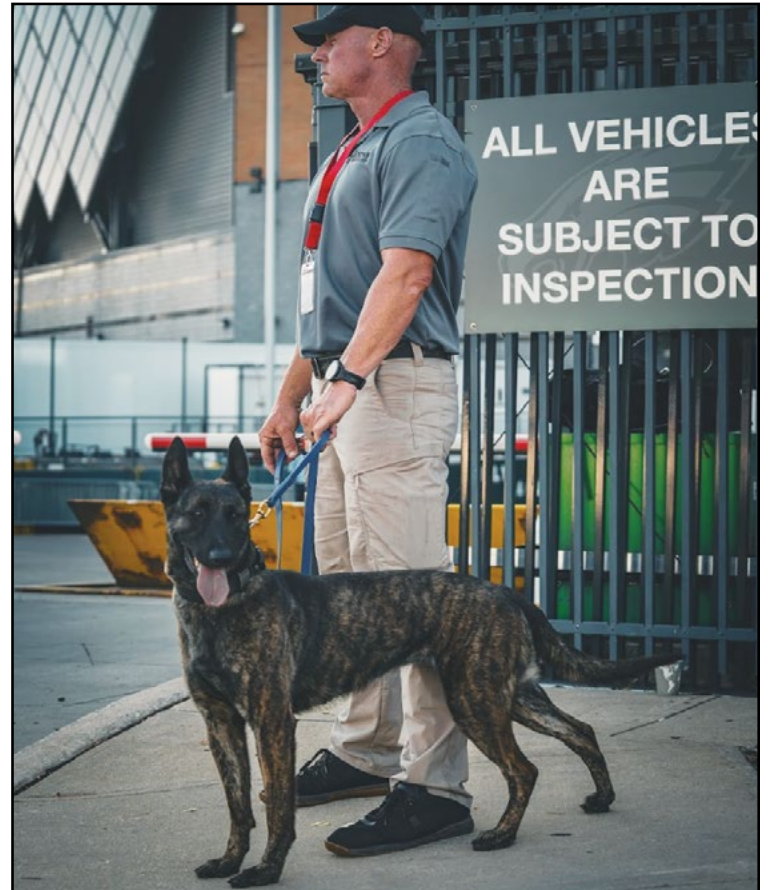
use the canine detection service year-round. However, 3DK9 is also hired for certain events, such as festivals, concerts and holiday events.

“For Halloween, we see a large demand for not just weapon canines but also narcotics canines,”

said Cilurso.

“We are available to the entire country; any day, any shift length,” Cilurso said. “We have the capabilities to adjust to what most traditional theme parks do. They identify attendance

► See 3DK9, page 74



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The 3DK9 team demonstrated their services to Golden Ticket Awards attendees at Kennywood, which is a customer of the service. AT/TIM BALDWIN

### 3DK9

Continued from page 73

days when they feel they need the presence the most. We coordinate the days well in advance."

General patrol dogs have further benefits.

"We see a lot of fights happen in parks. Canines have been proven to break up fights and de-escalate incidents compared to humans only," Cilurso said. "They are also an effective tactic in having guests exit the park in a timely manner. People traditionally tend to respond very well, and parks have been able to greatly decrease their park exit times."

One of the indirect advantages is that people aren't aware of what specific training the dog has, which can influence guests to make "the right decision."

"You get the benefit that

people don't know what kind of dog it is," Cilurso told *Amusement Today*. "Whatever type of canine is there, it can help deter bad actors from bringing any kind of explosive, weapon or narcotics."

Specially trained dogs are easily recognized by the public.

"When you look at metal detectors, they are a static point," said Cilurso. "Bad actors will commonly attempt to identify ways around them. The benefit you have with a canine is they are never stationary. They are consistently moving and evaluating. You have that benefit of knowing our security layer is a moving target. Also, parks have pre-opening sweeps to ensure no one could have hidden something in the park overnight. You have the ability to know."

The training is extensive so that dogs can han-

dle any situation, from a one-one-one situation to a crowded venue.

Cilurso loves his job.

"The dogs are incredible to watch in action," he told AT. "We love helping keep people safe, and yet have very approachable and friendly canines. We love working with the dogs."

The canines get certified for different circumstances such as crowds or if children are in the area. Cilurso said, "That certification ensures you have a very, very calm-demeanor dog working at the park."

Having this service increases the safety of any venue because it is a proactive approach.

"Weapons detection systems and metal detectors are extremely effective approaches, but what really helps keep parks safe is layers of different ways that make things difficult for bad actors," he said.

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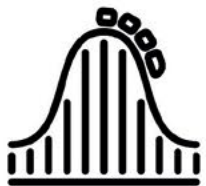
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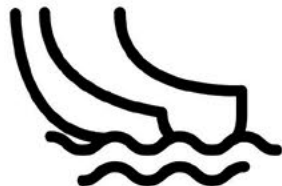




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# EpicSurf wins award for groundbreaking accessibility collaboration

COHOES, N.Y. — **EpicSurf** announced that its collaboration with **Aqua Creek** to develop the world's first standing wave lift system, enhancing surf accessibility, has been awarded the inaugural People's Choice Award at this year's Surf Park Summit. This award, which allowed the live audience to vote for their favorite submission, reflects the positive reception and excitement for EpicSurf's innovative efforts to expand inclusivity in the surfing community.

The collaboration with Aqua Creek, a leader in ability-enhancing equipment, is aimed at creating new ways for individuals with limited mobility to experience the thrill of surfing on a stationary wave. The partnership demonstrates EpicSurf's commitment to breaking down physical barriers and ensuring that surfing is accessible to everyone.

"We are incredibly honored to receive the People's Choice Award," said **Julie**

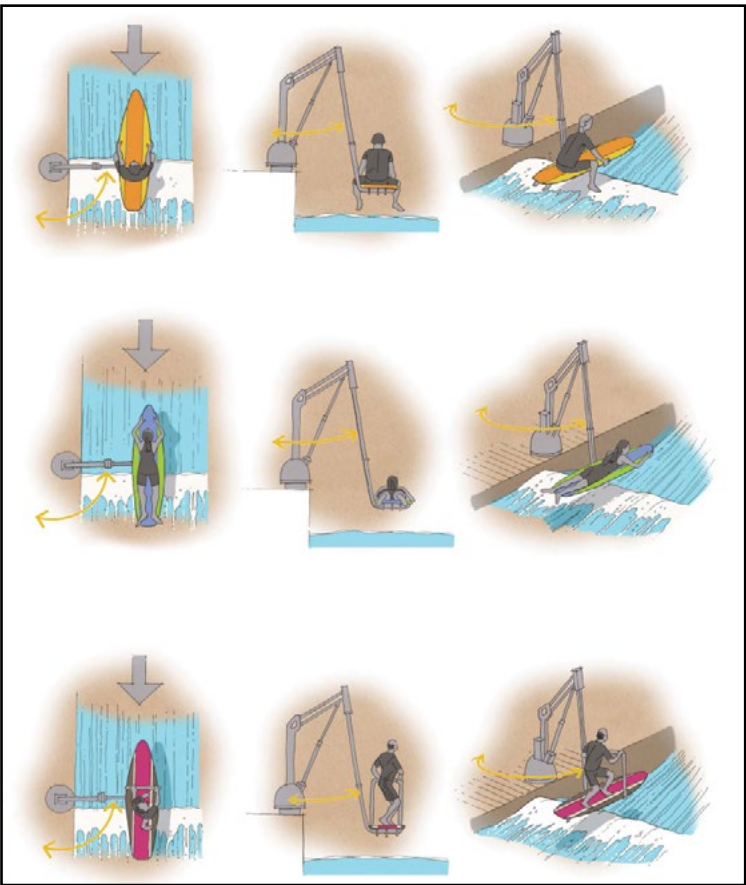


**EpicSurf's innovative lift system will enable people with limited mobility to access the wave easily, comfortably, and safely.**  
COURTESY EPICSURF

**Kline**, international sales and marketing manager of EpicSurf. "Our collaboration with Aqua Creek represents an important step in our mission to make surfing accessible to everyone, regardless of ability. We are excited to continue pushing the boundaries of what's possible in surf democratization."

Recognizing that true

democratization of surfing requires addressing the needs of individuals with physical disabilities, EpicSurf is collaborating with Aqua Creek to design a first-of-its-kind lift mechanism customized for standing waves. This innovative lift system will enable people with limited mobility to access the wave easily, comfortably and



safely. The design will allow users to enter the wave in a secure, supported position, significantly reducing the need to climb or fall.

This lift will be customiz-

able to meet individual needs, providing a tailored experience that ensures both safety and enjoyment. The system

► See SURF, page 78

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A photograph of a person swimming in the water, holding a red surfboard. The person is looking towards the camera.

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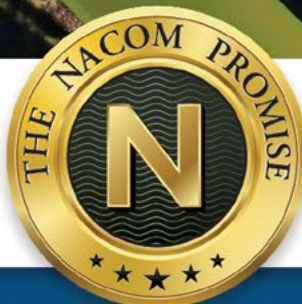


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► **SURF**  
Continued from page 76

will gently lower riders into the water and position them on the wave, allowing them to experience the thrill of surfing without barriers to access. After their ride, the lift will smoothly retrieve riders from the water, facilitating a seamless exit.

“From the development of EpicSurf, our focus has been to ensure it is accessible to everyone, regardless of skill level, age group, or ability,” commented **Bruce Quay**, COO of EpicSurf. “With over 50 years of experience in product design, engineering and innovation, we aim to provide the best entertainment value for patrons, deliver durable and reliable equipment for own-



EpicSurf's first-of-its-kind lift mechanism customized for standing waves (right) received the inaugural People's Choice Award at this year's Surf Park Summit (above). COURTESY EPICSURF

ers, and create safe and inclusive experiences for all.”

Additionally, EpicSurf is the first and only standing wave certified as an Autism Resource by the **International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES)**. With features like rapid wave adjustability, variable pump

flow and a retractable training bar, EpicSurf continues to serve as a leading choice for adaptive surfers and those with different abilities and needs.

The award highlights EpicSurf's ongoing efforts to make the joy of surfing accessible for all.

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## International Ride Training leveling up with additional, new clients for 2025

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Leading safety training and operational consultant **International Ride Training** (IRT) has been on an upward trajectory in the last year, adding new clients from around the world to its iROC Program.

iROC, which stands for International Ride Operator Certification, was designed by International Ride Training and includes all the tools and resources necessary for an attractions facility to succeed in implementing and maintaining compliance with the "Ten Critical Components of Ride Operator Safety." iROC third-party certification helps with standardization, risk management, education, support, and communication, all to improve guest and operator safety.

"International Ride Training has seen significant growth over the past year, with new clients joining the iROC family of world-class facilities, the expansion of the program into Europe, the rollout of iROC Program materials in multiple languages, and the addition of new members to the IRT team," said **Erik Beard**, managing member and general counsel of IRT.

In just the past year, **Tivoli Gardens**, Copenhagen, Denmark; **Kennywood**

Park, West Mifflin, Pennsylvania; **Ripley's Super Fun Park and Mountain Coaster**, Pigeon Forge, Tennessee; **Rye Playland**, Rye, New York; and **Dreamworld and WhiteWater World**, Gold Coast, Australia have all entered the iROC program, bringing the total number of certified facilities to 54 across North America, Europe and Australia.

"Looking ahead to 2025, we are excited to see our growth continue both domestically and abroad," added Beard. "IRT views the iROC Program as a partnership with our clients and we strive every year to find innovative ways, from new services to new technologies to new training and accountability strategies, to provide them with the highest quality service to effectively manage their ride operations risk profile."

**Lou Axt**, rides and aquatics operations manager at **Adventureland Park** of Altoona, Iowa, an iROC Facility since 2022, recently commented: "iROC has been transformative at Adventureland. The rides department is safer, more consistent and more professional as a result of iROC standards adoption."

•ridetraining.com

## Sky Zone takes steps for inclusion with partnership

PROVO, Utah — **Sky Zone** announced **Best Buddies International** as an official "Do Good" partner. Sky Zone has committed \$300,000 over three years to support Best Buddies' mission of inclusion and dedication to establishing a global volunteer movement, creating opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, leadership development, inclusive living and family support for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

"At Sky Zone, play rules here. We're deeply honored to welcome everyone at Best Buddies to the Sky Zone family," said **Shawn Hassel**, CEO of Sky Zone. "We're excited to see friendships thrive through active play and celebrate letting kids be kids, away from screens and stress, regardless of their abilities."

Throughout the 2024-2025 school year, Sky Zone and Best Buddies will host six flagship Friendship Tuesday Celebration events, where Best Buddies can come in and enjoy all the unique attractions Sky Zone has to offer free of charge from 4 to 6 p.m. in a private setting. The kick-off participating locations include Boynton Beach, Fla.; Clovis, Calif.; Orland Park, Ill.; Nashville, Tenn.; Springfield, Va. and Riverside, Calif.

"Sky Zone's commitment to inclusion, both in their parks and workforce, shows the profound impact that corporate partnerships can have in changing lives," said **Anthony K. Shriver**, founder, chairman and CEO, Best Buddies International. "We are excited to embark on this journey together and look forward to the friendships and memories that will be made."

In addition to the Best Buddies partnership, Sky Zone will be launching Friendship Tuesdays in 2025 to provide additional opportunities for play to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Designed for jumpers and their families who prefer fun in a quieter environment, the experience will feature lower occupancy, private rooms available for decompression, and other fun details to ensure people with IDD easily experience the fun of Sky Zone.

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AIMS International celebrates 60 years

In 1964 a group of suppliers created an organization to answer questions about their rides, teach proper maintenance and inspection procedures and showcase their products. They named it **American Recreational Equipment Association (AREA)**.

In 1994, the association was renamed **Amusement Industry Manufacturers and Suppliers** or **AIMS International** as it is more commonly known. Dedicated to improving safety in the amusement industry, AIMS' purpose is to promote and preserve the prosperity of the industry through communication and education and to foster working relationships between safety professionals, manufacturers, trade associations as well as local, state and federal government entities.

Today, the association consists of qualified American and international companies actively engaged in design, manufacture, production, sales and service within the amusement industry. AIMS programs are designed to help professionals at amusement, adventure,

and water parks; traveling shows and family entertainment centers learn and stay current with safety standards, regulations and best practices.

AIMS is at the forefront of advancing safety standards, fostering collaboration and championing best practices for amusement rides and attractions. None of that would be possible without the hundreds of world-class instructors and volunteers who make it happen. AIMS is grateful to celebrate these volunteer instructors who teach year after year, and often decade after decade at the AIMS Safety Seminar.

" When I was at **Arrow** and **Paramount**, neither participated in AIMS. I first became involved when I joined Herschend," stated **Kevin Russell**, corporate director of maintenance and engineering at **Herschend Family Entertainment** and a 10-year instructor at AIMS. "**Gina** and **Tony Claassen** convinced me to attend in 2014. For 2015, **Linda Freeman** asked if I would join her to teach two cybersecurity classes. From there,

I just started adding a class here and there. I believe if you want the classes for your people, be prepared to teach some."

At the very first AREA Safety Conference, there were 30 attendees. Today, AIMS International is the world leader in amusement safety education with over 130 instructors delivering 400 hours of practical and classroom learning in nine different disciplines. The 2024 AIMS Safety Seminar achieved a record 800 attendees.

Through its AIMS On The Road program, safety education content is delivered to users across the country and around the globe. AIMS On The Road brings multi-day events to parks across the country and works with international partners in Canada, Colombia, Singapore and Chile.

As AIMS reflects on its extraordinary journey, the association honors the achievements of the past and looks to a future where safety remains the cornerstone of fun and enjoyment for all.


Celebrate with AIMS International at the IAAPA Expo at booth #4708.

Space for this AIMS page is provided courtesy of Amusement Today as a corporate partner of AIMS Intl. Content is provided by AT & AIMS.



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# Gateway Ticketing deploys control system at multiple Saudi venues

GILBERTSVILLE, Pa. — Gateway Ticketing Systems, a global leader in ticketing, admission control and revenue-generating solutions for the attractions industry, announced in September the successful deployment of its Galaxy Guest Management and Ticketing System at 26 Red Sea Children's Entertainment areas across Saudi Arabia. Prologic First, Gateway's partner in the region, oversaw the deployment.

According to Sharon Parker, Gateway's director of marketing, Gateway's Galaxy system is a comprehensive solution for guest management and ticketing, designed to enhance the visitor experience at attractions worldwide.

"This powerful platform integrates ticketing, admission control, membership management and retail transactions into

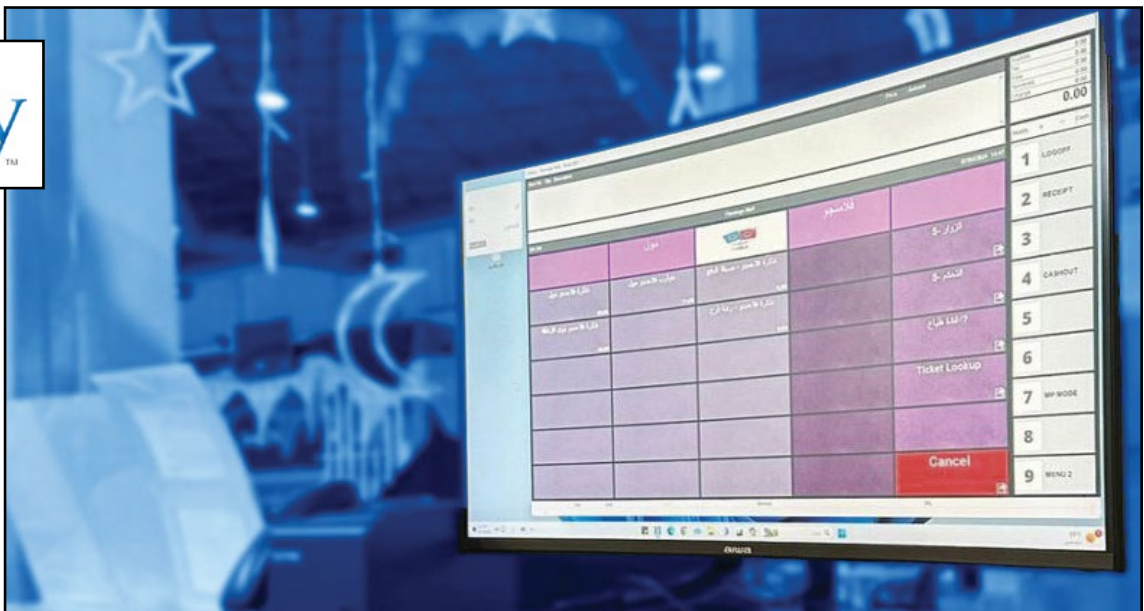


a single system," Parker said. "With real-time data and reporting capabilities, it enables venues to increase revenue, streamline operations and provide a personalized, seamless experience for guests."

For guests at the Red Sea Children's Entertainment venues, the system offers faster entry procedures, streamlined bookings and secure transactions. It allows the guests to focus more on the entertainment experience.

And while the system is enhancing the experience for guests, it is razor-focused on the operator.

"Our Galaxy solution is built with the operator in mind," said Tom Chiarella, executive vice president and head of product



Red Sea Children's Entertainment areas across Saudi Arabia recently added Gateway Ticketing's Galaxy Guest Management and Ticketing System. The unique platform integrates ticketing, admission control, membership management and retail transactions into a single system. COURTESY GATEWAY TICKETING

development. "From a consistent user interface and experience across point-of-sale, access control and call center applications to detailed operation and financial reporting through Reporting Plus and consistent contact with

guests leveraging our CRM Plus offering, we provide a complete set of tools for operators large and small."

Chiarella said with this complete, integrated solution that spans business operations, owners have peace of mind

in seamless operations and communication across systems and internal teams.

After the initial deployment of Galaxy, maintenance releases are available to clients regularly

► See GATEWAY, page 86

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A photograph of a roller coaster with colorful, striped balloons (green and yellow, blue and yellow, red and yellow) attached to the cars, set against a clear blue sky. The coaster's steel structure is visible.

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►GATEWAY  
 Continued from page 84

to improve the performance, stability and reliability of the applications.

“Along the way, we will also include new features and functionality that will allow the operators to grow and evolve their business and what products they offer to their guests,” Chiarella said. “Maintenance upgrades are recommended and up to the operator to deploy at a time or season that works for their venue.”

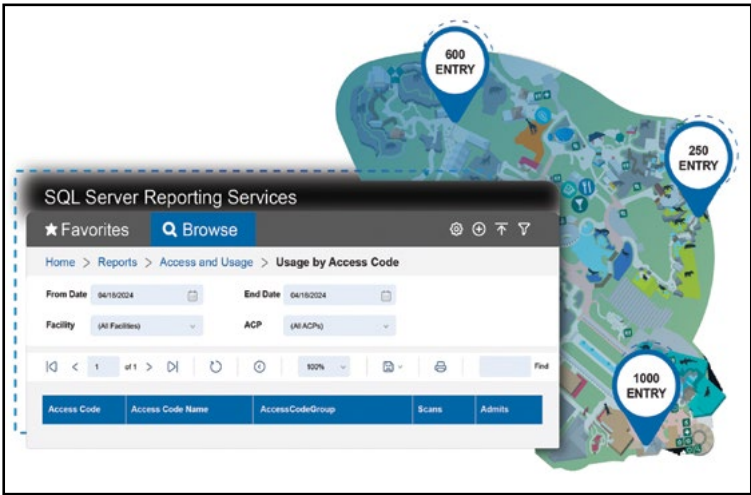
The strategic collaboration between Gateway and Prologic First marks a significant leap in enhancing the visitor experience at these popular children's entertainment centers.

“This significant milestone would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the exceptional team at Prologic First, who oversaw

the project from start to finish,” said Michael Andre, president and CEO of Gateway Ticketing Systems. “Their commitment to excellence has ensured that we can extend our innovative solutions to enhance the experience of every guest who visits the Red Sea Children's Entertainment venues daily. We are excited to see our technology in action and look forward to contributing to memorable, seamless experiences for their customers.”

Prologic First designs smart solutions for the hospitality industry, such as integrated software solutions for hotels and restaurants by using cloud-based solutions, just to name one offering.

“We are excited to be part of the Red Sea Children's Zone's mission to provide exceptional entertainment to children and families across the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,” said Amit Sharda, CEO



Gateway Ticketing's system offers real-time data and reporting capabilities, which enables venues to increase revenue, streamline operations and provide a personalized, seamless experience for guests. COURTESY GATEWAY TICKETING

at Prologic First. “With Galaxy at the heart of their operations, we look forward to contributing to countless moments of happiness and fun in the years to come.”

Gateway officials said that Prologic First's successful implementation of the Galaxy system at Red Sea's entertainment areas further demonstrates their dedication to providing

state-of-the-art technology that meets the evolving needs of Gateway clients and its customers.

“Gateway takes great care in tailoring a professional services package to meet customer-prioritized requirements,” said Chase Mory, director of operations. “We listen to customers to deeply understand their desired outcomes, enabling a customizable project. We take

pride in balancing customers' scope, schedules, and budgets to provide the flexibility to accommodate a wide range of operators. With this in mind, implementations are typically measured in months.”

Gateway has over 500 clients worldwide. The company continues its growth and is striving to remain at the forefront of technological advancements. Gateway officials feel the company's impact on the attractions industry is noteworthy, with several game-changing offerings, including the award-winning Galaxy Connect platform.

Gateway employs software developers, technical experts, IT professionals, project managers, customer service representatives and other professionals in the United States, United Kingdom and Canada.

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## The critical choice of an attraction's technology partner

DALLAS, Texas — It's without question that incorporating and upgrading technology is part of the path ahead for modern attractions. Considering and selecting a tech partner is a business investment that requires asking critical questions.

"While cost is a factor for consideration, attractions that settle for just any tech partner might learn the hard, costly lessons of going with the inexpensive choice; assuming all systems are the same," stated **Embed CEO Renee Welsh**.



Welsh

How often does the tech provider innovate? Constant tech development and innovation will allow attractions to stay ahead of the industry with tech that will become the norm in the FEC sector. This as opposed to taking a white-label software and branding it, meaning a third party is driving the innovation.

"A tech partner should have established and world-renown platforms," explained Welsh. "For instance, with its partnership with **Apple, Google and Amazon Web Services**, Embed is able to utilize their pilot technology and adapt it for the family entertainment industry, sharing best practices from other hyper-competitive industries."

Consider this question: "who else trusts this tech partner with their business?" If it's the partner of choice for comparable attractions, perhaps it's the best choice.

How secure and reliable is the system?

"The measure of backend tech reliability is based on whether you're able to operate during network outages without being reliant only on either cloud or onsite backup servers that may crash and get overworked," said Welsh. "Operators can largely benefit from a hybrid system, especially when there are downtimes."

To have the best of tech hardware and software, check the ecosystem of tech partners behind the tech.

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November 18 - 22, 2024  
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### 2024 IAFE Convention & Tradeshow

December 1 - 4, 2024  
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### AIMS International Safety Seminar

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### NAARSO Safety Seminar

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### International Ride Training's Ride Camp

February 10 - 14, 2025  
Galveston, Texas  
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### 2025 IISF Trade Show & Extravanza

February 11 - 15, 2025  
Gibson, Florida  
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### Amusement Expo International

March 17 - 20, 2025  
Las Vegas, Nevada  
[amusementexpo.org](http://amusementexpo.org)

### IAAPA Expo Middle East

March 30 - April 2, 2025  
Abu Dhabi, U.A.E.  
[iaapa.org/iaapaexpomiddleeast](http://iaapa.org/iaapaexpomiddleeast)

### RSA Convention and Trade Show

May 11 - 15, 2025  
Las Vegas, Nevada  
[rollerskating.com](http://rollerskating.com)

### IAAPA Expo Asia

June 30 - July 3, 2025  
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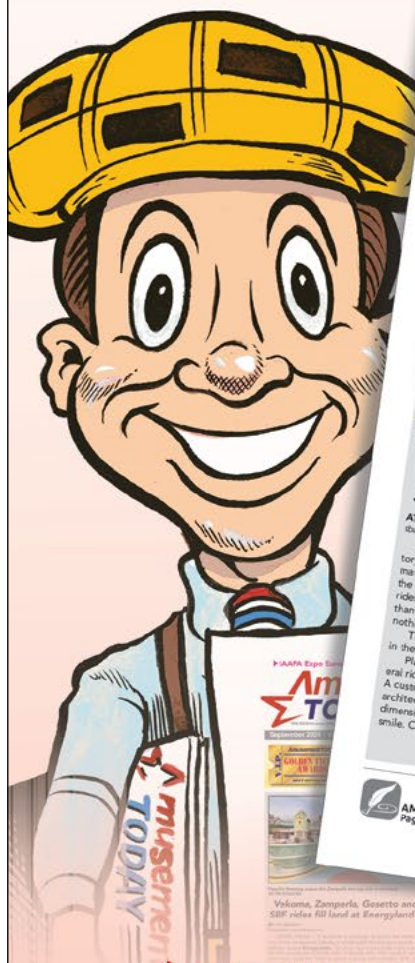
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Get started now:



Name

Name of the person making the request

Email

Corporate email

CC Emails

Do you want to keep any colleagues updated?

Serial Numbers

It is the numerical code found on the door of the electrical panel

Subject

What do you need?

Description

Attachments

SELETTA FILE

Nessun file selezionato

### HOW TO CHECK YOUR CASES?

1. Go to the Contacts page and scroll to the bottom of **zamperla.com/contacts**
2. Click the **CHECK MY CASES** button
3. Enter the **email address** you used to open the case
4. Check your email for a **one-time password**
5. Enter the password on the website
6. You'll see a list of your cases
7. Click on a case to see more detail